


THE GREAT- GRANDMOTHER

GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM



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THE GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SPANISH GOLD

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LALAGE'S LOVERS

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THE ISLAND MYSTERY

UP, THE REBELS

INISHEENY

THE LOST LAWYER

THE ADVENTURES OF DOCTOR WHITTY

GENERAL JOHN REGAN

THE GREAT- GRANDMOTHER

BY
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CHAPTER I

TWO men stood in the porch of the hotel at Carnew. A sluttish maidservant, half hidden in the gloom of the inner hall, watched them. She was interested because they seemed to be quarrelling, and she hoped that one or other of them would soon pass beyond the stage of hot words and strike a blow at his opponent. She was disappointed. The quarrel was a one-sided affair, not, properly speaking, a quarrel at all, for one of the two men made no kind of reply to the torrent of words which the other poured on him.

The man who spoke, volubly, indignantly, with a fine command of invective, was Mr. Charles Royce, the solicitor. Most lawyers in small towns in Connaught are prosperous and independent men. Royce was particularly prosperous because he was the only man of his profession in Carnew. He was able to boast with perfect truth that he never hesitated to speak his mind to anyone.

The other man, who stood silent, occasionally shrugging his shoulders, was Mr. Cohen, not a citizen of Carnew, not a Connaught man, nor even an Irishman. He belonged to an ancient race which centuries

ago learned to suffer in silence and to wait. He waited now, while Royce abused him, while a grinning maidservant watched him, and he gave no sign of anger or resentment.

A car—one of those horse-drawn jaunting-cars which are still the most popular vehicles in the west of Ireland—drove along the street and pulled up at the door of the hotel. Royce stopped his harangue abruptly.

“The train must be in,” he said.

Carnew, the terminus of a branch line of the Midland and Great Western Railway, is served by one train which arrives shortly after noon each day. Its coming is, therefore, an event. The coming of passengers by it—passengers other than the familiar commercial travellers and Government inspectors—is a very rare event. But two strangers sat together on the side of the car which stopped at the door of the hotel. In all Royce’s long experience of Carnew he had never known two strangers to arrive on the same day in the month of February, the deadest and least exciting of all months in the year. It was, therefore, small wonder that he stopped abusing Cohen, and set himself to the more exciting task of finding out who the strangers were, and what they wanted.

One of the two passengers jumped off the car, took a suit-case from the seat beside the driver and stepped into the porch of the hotel. Royce, glancing at his clothes, noting his face and figure, saw at once that he was neither a commercial traveller nor a Government inspector of any kind. He guessed him to be an Englishman, felt almost certain that he was a gentleman.

Cohen, recovering himself after the torrent of words poured on him, walked up to the car and took his seat beside the other passenger. Royce's eyes followed him and found the other stranger a sufficiently remarkable man. He would have been remarkable anywhere. In the street of a shabby Connaught town, seated on the side of a rickety car, he was actually startling. He wore a long, fur coat of the opulent kind which people associate with prosperous theatrical managers and fashionable tenor singers. He had a long, silky beard carefully trimmed to a point, and a moustache curiously twisted on each side of his mouth. His face was oval and sallow. A pair of slanting eyes looked out under the brim of a wide, soft hat. A faint whiff of scent reached Royce from the car. Behind the stranger lay a small bag more like a lady's dressing-case than an article of man's baggage. It appeared to be the only luggage that he had.

Cohen shouted an order to the car driver.

"Lishreen," he said. "Straight out to Lishreen."

The car drove off. Royce turned to the man who stood beside him.

"Now I wonder who the devil that fellow is," he said, "and I wonder what Cohen wants to take him out to Lishreen for."

He spoke as if his companion were an old and familiar friend. The young stranger was more than a little surprised at the warmth of his greeting.

"Now what do you think Cohen has just been wanting me to do?" said Royce.

The stranger neither knew nor cared; but he did know what he wanted to do himself. He wanted

to order, and as soon as possible to eat some luncheon. He had left London by the mail train the night before and had travelled, very hungrily, straight through to Carnew. Royce, who was a tactful and sympathetic man, guessed his wishes.

"Come along in," he said. "I'll make them give you a decent lunch, and it's what they mightn't do if I wasn't with you. While you're eating it I'll tell you what that scoundrel Cohen had the nerve to suggest to me."

He stepped into the hotel and shouted cheerfully for some one called "Katie." The girl who had been watching his quarrel with Cohen appeared after he had called her five or six times.

"Katie," said Royce, "will you fetch in what's left of the ham that the boss brought home with him on Monday, and don't you dare tell me that Cohen ate it all. Nor don't be offering this gentleman chops in the place of it, for he's a friend of mine, and I'll not have him taking the edge off his teeth with a tough chop, as tough as it would be if you cooked it. Go on, now, like a good girl, and you may bring me a bottle of porter at the same time."

Katie grinned and left them. Royce led his new friend into the dining-room of the hotel.

"As I was saying to you this minute," he said, "Cohen has nerve enough to ask anything. I don't blame him for that, for he's been selling tea to the farmers' wives round these parts for the last five years, and that's a job which takes nerve and perseverance. But I'm hanged if he'd any right to ask me to give him leave to pick and choose and pay his own price for what he wants out of Lishreen

House a whole month before the auction. Did ever you hear the like of that ? ”

The stranger appeared totally uninterested in the contents of Lishreen House or their future fate. But the mention of Lishreen seemed to suggest to him that he might use the time spent in waiting for his luncheon.

“ Do you happen to know Mr. Royce, the solicitor,” he said, “ and where he lives ? I want to see him on business this afternoon.”

“ If you mean Charlie Royce, and I suppose you must, for there’s no one else of the name in the place, you haven’t far to look for him. You’re talking to him this minute. Do you mean to say you don’t know I’m Charlie Royce ? I thought every one in Connaught knew that.”

“ But,” said the stranger, “ I come from London.”

Even that did not seem an adequate excuse to Mr. Royce. Katie entered the room at that moment with the ham. He appealed to her.

“ Katie,” he said, “ here’s a gentleman who says he doesn’t know who I am, or what my name is, or anything else about me. Now what do you think of that ? ”

Katie looked critically at this ignorant stranger, and the inspection did not seem to create a favourable impression on her mind. She sniffed as she set down the ham.

“ I’d say,” she replied, “ that the gentleman must be some kind of a foreigner. Maybe he’s English.”

CHAPTER II

ROYCE'S new-found friend waited till the girl had left the room, and then began to explain his business. He did not, apparently, feel that he had attained Royce's eminence as a public character, so he started by telling who he was.

"My name," he said, "is Price; Basil Price."

"Son of old Price, the auctioneer of Drumbo?" said Royce.

"No, I'm not."

"I'm glad of that," said Royce. "For your father can't have the auction job at Lishreen House. I've put that into the hands of MacDermot, and I wouldn't like to have to be sending a man a message of that sort by the mouth of his own son."

"What I want to see you about," said Basil Price, "isn't an auction at all. I never heard of your auction before, and I don't care a hang about it, anyway."

"That's just as well," said Royce, "for your father couldn't get the job no matter how you asked for it. That is to say, old Price couldn't get it even if he was your father, which it appears he isn't. The fact is" (here he whispered in a confidential way), "old Price has the name of being hand in glove

with a ring of furniture dealers in Dublin, and I wouldn't care to trust him to sell a kitchen chair. You needn't tell him I said so, but it's a fact."

Basil Price had carved himself a quantity of ham, and was beginning to feel more cheerful.

"I'm not the least likely ever to see old Price," he said, "so it will be no temptation to me to repeat what you told me. What I want to see you about——"

But Royce was apparently not yet ready to take up Price's business.

"I don't believe," he said, "that there's a single solitary thing in Lishreen House worth buying. Old Sir Amos Coppinger sold off everything of value long ago, before he fell into the hands of the blood-sucking crew of moneylenders who are finishing him off now. All the same, one can't be too careful. That fellow Cohen knows the insides of every house about the country, and if there's a nice bit of furniture anywhere he has his eye on it. I happen to know that he's pretty thick with Lady Coppinger. Sells her tea and that sort of thing. You know, of course, who Lady Coppinger is?"

"No, I don't," said Price, "and I don't want to. What I'm here to talk to you about is——"

"Lady Coppinger was the cook," said Royce. "Sir Amos married her twenty years ago, and the Lord knows why he did it. She wasn't in the least bit good-looking, and she certainly couldn't cook. What's more, she's no kind of a manager, and things have simply gone from bad to worse since the marriage."

"What I want to see you about," said Basil desperately, "is the fishing on Lishreen River."

"Then why on earth didn't you say so before," said Royce, "instead of wasting time talking about Cohen, and old Price, and Lady Coppinger? You can have a day on the river with pleasure. I'll take you there to-morrow. I'll take you there this afternoon if you like. But where's your rod? You don't seem to have brought a rod with you. Perhaps you left it on the car, and Cohen has carried it off with him. In that case you won't see it again unless you bring him into Court, and even then it will be hard to make him give it up. However, I'll take up the case for you and see what can be done. I'd like to get my knife into Cohen if I could on account of that impudent proposal he made to me just now. We'll drop into my office before we go to Lishreen and tell my clerk to write a stinger to Cohen. Then I'll get you a rod. The river's in good condition and we ought to get a fish or two."

Basil laid down his knife and fork and made a determined effort to get to business with the garrulous Royce.

"I didn't come here to ask you for a day's fishing," he said. "I came on business. I'm Lord Edmund Troyte's private secretary."

"Oh, are you?" said Royce. "He's the man who's been corresponding with me about the fishing, and I suppose as you're private secretary you wrote the letters. Do you know, I've always rather fancied the job of a private secretary. Do you get a pretty good screw? But you've finished your lunch, haven't you? You won't get any more, anyway. Katie's simply incapable of making a pancake, much less a jam roll. Never mind about the bill. I'll see about

that afterwards, and charge it up to you against whatever damages we get out of Cohen for stealing your salmon rod ! ”

Basil felt that if ever he was to get down to the business which had brought him to Carnew he must clear away the various entanglements which Royce was spreading in his path.

“ But Cohen didn’t steal my rod,” he said formally. “ I didn’t bring one with me.”

“ Never mind,” said Royce, “ we’ll try him on with it. He may think he’s dropped it off the car, and if so he’ll pay up rather than face the publicity of the Court. He’s got some shady game on or he wouldn’t be going out to Lishreen on a car with that friend of his, a fellow that looks like a play-actor, dressed up in a fur coat. Believe you me, Mr. Price, Cohen would rather pay you the value of the salmon rod twice over than go into Court and have me cross-examining him about his business at Lishreen.”

Basil, ignoring Mr. Cohen’s business, made another effort to get to his own.

“ Lord Edmund,” he said, “ is greatly annoyed at not being able to get the fishing at once.”

“ I’d have been greatly annoyed if he had got it,” said Royce, “ and between you and me, in strict confidence, that’s exactly the reason he didn’t get it. That fishing has been practically mine ever since poor old Coppinger went bust.”

“ But why did you advertise it in ‘ The Field,’ ” said Basil, “ if you didn’t want to rent it ? ”

“ Oh, the creditors insisted on that,” said Royce. “ You see they’d have pocketed the rent if I’d suc-

ceeded in letting it. But they're a shady lot, and they deserve to get stuck occasionally, so I've always taken jolly good care that the fishing never is let, no matter what answers I get to the advertisement. But do you mean to tell me that that's what brought you over to Lishreen ? ”

“ Lord Edmund sent me over to see about the fishing,” said Basil. “ He was really anxious to get it, and to tell you the truth I'd have been very glad myself if he had.”

“ Well,” said Royce, “ you shall have your afternoon on the river anyway, and that will be some consolation to you. But I don't think I'll go with you. I've got to see old Coppinger some time or other to settle about his clearing out of Lishreen House, and I may as well do it this afternoon. Besides, I want to keep an eye on Cohen and that friend of his. I don't like the look of that fellow one bit. I wonder where he comes from.”

“ London,” said Basil. “ I can tell you that much. He got into the train with me at Euston last night, and we travelled over together.”

“ He smells of scent,” said Royce. “ A fellow who comes from London and smells of scent is likely to be a wrong one. That's my idea, anyhow. However, I'll drive you out there, and you can fish while I prowl about and interview poor old Coppinger. Now what do you think of that for a plan ? ”

It struck Basil as quite a pleasant plan ; but he hesitated to agree with it. He felt he was being rushed along rather too fast and was in danger of totally neglecting Lord Edmund's affairs. But Royce did not seem to contemplate the possibility of a refusal.

He took Basil by the arm and drew him from the hotel, talking volubly as they went. He picked up Basil's suit-case as they passed through the porch.

"We'll stay the night in 'Lishreen Hotel,'" he said, "and then you can fish again to-morrow. By that time I expect I'll have found out what Cohen is after, and if so we'll both fish. Anyway, 'Lishreen Hotel' is better to stop in than this one. The cook there can make soda bread and boil eggs, which this miserable girl can't. I'll get my wife to put up a few things to eat in a hamper before we start. That's one of the advantages of having a wife. You can nearly always get food if you want it. I suppose you're not married. Well, take my advice and get a wife as soon as you can. There are lots of girls knocking about who'd suit a man like you down to the ground."

CHAPTER III

HALF an hour later Royce and Basil Price were bumping along a very bad road in a Ford car. Royce's clerk had been left in the office to write a threatening letter to Mr. Cohen, accusing him of the theft of a salmon rod. Mrs. Royce, a cheerful and competent little lady, who seemed accustomed to her husband's ways, had packed a suit-case for him and a small hamper of provisions. Soda bread and boiled eggs make a nutritious and sufficient diet; but Charlie Royce liked something more to fall back on. He liked, and on this occasion had, a bottle of whisky of a better kind than was obtainable in the "Lishreen Hotel."

Lishreen is little more than nine miles from Carnew. Royce, who drove as recklessly as he talked, took barely twenty minutes over the journey. But he managed, even in that short time, to impart a great deal of information to Basil Price.

Sir Amos Coppinger, it appeared, was a country gentleman who originally owned a fine estate and occupied a good position. An incurable habit of spending a little more than he had ruined the estate. The marriage with his cook deprived him of his position.

"People couldn't stand Biddy Nolan," said Royce, "and when you've seen her you won't wonder. A more incompetent, helpless, slatternly woman you never set eyes on in your life. The wonder is that poor Coppinger has hung on so long without committing suicide."

But Sir Amos, according to Royce's account, was not likely to hang on much longer. His unfortunate life would finish itself without any direct effort on his part.

"Gout, rheumatism, and kidneys," said Royce. "The old boy's a perfect cripple. Never stirs out of his chair except to be dragged up to bed. Heart's dotty, too. I expect that having to leave Lishreen House will pretty well finish him. I don't know what'll happen to the daughter then."

"Oh, there is a daughter?" said Basil vaguely.

Biddy Nolan had, so Royce said, produced and reared a daughter; very nearly the only thing she had ever succeeded in doing. But Royce did not seem much interested in the daughter. Basil was not interested at all. His mind while Royce talked was troubled by the thought that he had no right to stay in Lishreen. Lord Edmund was a sort of political Martha, much occupied with his service of the State, careful and troubled about many things, about treaties made by Czecho-Slovakia, about the position of English Labour leaders, about the embarrassing exploits of Kings who wanted to regain their thrones, about the condition of European currencies, and—of course—about Ireland. No statesman ever escapes Ireland. Each separate interest had in Lord Edmund's library its own file of papers,

its own card index, its own mass of correspondence. And among living men there was no one who could find the files or disentangle the card indexes except Basil Price. Without him Lord Edmund was as helpless as a sailor deprived of his compass. Basil had promised to return from Ireland without delay. Indeed, to leave Carnew on the very evening of the day of his arrival. He wanted to keep his promise ; but there was no use his going until he had settled something about the fishing. Lord Edmund really wished to secure that fishing. But Royce—this incurably garrulous solicitor—talked and talked ; talked about everything except business.

At the bottom of a long slope, which Royce took at over thirty miles an hour, the car slowed down.

“There’s the river,” said Royce, “away to your right, and if you take my advice you’ll take the pool above the lake first. Do you see that boathouse ? Well, 150 yards above that you’ll come on a pool and I may tell you that I hooked a fourteen-pounder there last week. If you want to try the lake you can. There’s a boat in the boathouse, and if you walk about a bit looking as if you had half a crown in your pocket that you want to get rid of, somebody will come along and offer to row you. You’ll find me tottering about on Cohen’s tracks when you’re tired. But bring back a fish if you possibly can. We’ll want some steaks for supper, and the cook in the hotel knows how to fry them. I taught her myself. That’s the hotel.”

He pointed towards the village, which lay at the mouth of the river, a little drawn back from a sandy beach.

"It's the only two-storied house in the place, except the priest's, which has three bushes in front of it, so you can't make a mistake. That's Lishreen House on the hill to the south of the bay. I suppose Lord Edmund doesn't happen to want a house of the sort. He'd have to spend three or four thousand to make it habitable ; but he'd get it dirt cheap to start with. Between ourselves, he'd be a fool to buy it considering the state the country's in at present. But then lots of men are fools. You might mention it to him when you get back. Now this is the place for you to hop out ! "

He stopped the car as he spoke.

"The rod's in the back of the car. Don't go off without it. It's no use losing two rods on the same day, particularly as you can't sue me for the price of this one. There's a landing net and a gaff. Good luck to you. Try the purple fly with the grey tail if you're fishing the pool. If you go on the lake take the big orange one. I don't know why it is, but the fish in the lake like something a bit gaudy to jump at."

Basil felt that he had been hustled off his feet and rushed into a position he never intended to occupy. He could not help feeling, too, that he was disloyal to his employer, that he ought to have insisted more firmly on discussing Lord Edmund's position with regard to the fishing. He was, it will be seen, a young man of some conscience. But he was also a young man who greatly enjoyed catching salmon.

He stood on the side of the road and watched Royce and his motor speed along into the village of Lishreen. The smell of the bog myrtle was in his nos-

trils The fresh sea air filled his lungs. A south-west wind, warm and moist, was blowing gently. One cloud after another crossed the sky, obscuring the sun for a while. It was almost a perfect day for fishing.

Basil reflected. It was no longer possible for him to leave Carnew that night, however he tried. He would see Royce again that evening and spend an hour or two with him before going to bed. The question of Lord Edmund and the fishing could be discussed then. It certainly could not be discussed any sooner. Also, it seemed reasonable to find out what the river was like before securing it for Lord Edmund, if indeed he could secure it.

He drew the rod from its cover and fitted the joints together. He held it outstretched in his hand, testing the weight and balance of it. The sporting instinct was too strong for his conscience. He picked up the landing-net and gaff and strode down to the river, ankle deep in young bracken. He arrived at the pool which Royce had recommended. The look of the brown water, slightly ruffled with the breeze, silenced the last murmurings of his conscience. He fitted the reel into its place, ran the line through the rings of the rod, and took the purple fly with the grey tail from the book which Royce had given him.

Half an hour later, all thoughts of duty and all sense of the importance of Lord Edmund's affairs swept from his mind, he was into a fish, a big fish with plenty of fight in him. There followed an hour of strenuous excitement, of splashings and runnings, of alternating hope and despair. Then Basil found

himself with a fresh run salmon at his feet, a few yards above the boathouse which Royce had pointed out to him. He sat down and lit his pipe. He wanted to rest a little. The life of the private secretary of a great statesman is not calculated to keep a man in good training. A salmon rod is heavy to an arm which has wielded nothing bigger than a pen for many months. The intense excitement of his final struggle with the fish had left him a little breathless. It was exceedingly pleasant to sit still on the grass, to feel the soft breeze blowing past him, and to contemplate the prize at his feet. Basil sat and smoked with the utmost content.

Before he had finished his pipe he was aware that he was agreeably tired. He wanted to go on fishing, but he was not quite sure that he wanted to go on fishing from the bank of the river. It was stiff work walking through the grass and bracken, still stiffer work plunging among stones and slipping among wet rocks. He remembered what Royce had said about fishing on the lake. There was a boat in the boathouse a few yards below where he sat, a boat which was at his service if he could find anyone to row her. Royce did not seem to think there would be any difficulty about that.

"Walk about looking as if you had half a crown in your pocket which you want to get rid of, and somebody will turn up."

So Royce said. Basil had a half-crown in his pocket, indeed several half-crowns, which he was quite willing to spend. He stood up and looked about him. There was no one to be seen. It seemed a vain thing to assume a look of generosity, even to

imitate the expression of a reckless spendthrift, unless there was some one to appreciate it. It was no use jingling the half-crowns against one another when there was no one to hear.

He walked towards the boathouse. When he reached it he became aware that there was some one inside, some one hammering wood. Basil stopped and listened. There was no mistake about the sound. He thought that a carpenter must be at work repairing a boat. No doubt the carpenter would be willing to stop his work for a while and earn half a crown in addition to his day's wages by rowing about the lake, unless, indeed, there were only one boat, and she were having new planks put into her.

Basil opened the door of the boathouse and looked in. What he saw surprised him very much. An old man of very venerable and benevolent appearance was deliberately breaking up the only boat in the place. He had a sledge hammer in his hand, and was knocking the planks off her ribs. Basil stared at him in amazement. The boat was an old one—that was plain at a glance, but she was not so old as to be useless, and since there was no other boat it seemed extraordinarily foolish to break her up.

The old man was working hard, as if he wanted to get through with his job. At first he took no notice of Basil.

"Hullo," said Basil.

The old man turned round, let the hammer rest on the ground, and bowed courteously.

"What the devil are you doing to the boat?"

said Basil. "It looks to me as if you were breaking her up."

The old man eyed Basil keenly for a minute. Then he shook his head slowly. Basil thought he must be deaf, and repeated his question about the boat in a loud shout. The old man shook his head again.

"Deaf," said Basil, "and probably dumb. I wonder if I ought to stop him smashing the boat."

But the old man was not dumb. He began to talk rapidly, with a good deal of gesticulation. Basil could not understand a word he said. It occurred to him that the old man must be mad, and that his unintelligible speech was the gibbering of a maniac. In that case it was certainly his duty to interfere and to stop the destruction of the boat. He laid down his rod and landing net, set his precious fish outside the door of the boathouse, and took a firm hold of the gaff. It was not a very good weapon. It would certainly be over-matched by the sledge hammer which the old man held. But Basil hoped that it would not come to an actual fight.

He stood looking at the old man, who gazed placidly back at him. The expression of his face was gentle and kindly. His long white beard made him look like an amiable patriarch. His eyes were bright and intelligent. He did not look in the least like a lunatic.

"Sassenach," said the old man, pointing to Basil, and smiling.

Then it occurred to Basil that the old man was talking Irish. He had heard that there were still to be found in the west of Ireland a few people who could speak nothing but Irish. This man was evi-

dently one of them. He looked old enough to be using Sanskrit as his mother tongue. Basil was bewildered and puzzled. He did not know a word of Irish, and he wanted very much to communicate with this old man in order to find out what he was doing with the boat. Most men get confused when addressed suddenly in a language which they do not understand. Basil had been in this position several times in Roumania, in Italy, even in France, though he did know a little French.

“ Vous cassez le bateau,” he said. “ Pourquoi ? ”

He had a dim feeling that any foreign language must be intelligible to a man who does not know English. Besides, he had once dealt with a Greek who knew no English but replied quite intelligently to Basil's French.

The old man merely looked puzzled, much more puzzled than he looked when he was addressed in English. But he was very courteous. He paused for a minute and thought deeply. Then he said very slowly and deliberately :

“ There is no Beurla to me. That is, I have not the English.”

“ Ah ! ” said Basil helplessly. “ Ah ! Oh, indeed ! How odd ! ”

He gave up the idea that the old man was mad. He found it difficult to believe that so gentle and courteous a person could be breaking up a boat out of malice or with any criminal intent. The old man laid down his hammer, piled several of the broken planks on top of each other, and spread his coat over them. Then with a sweeping gesture and a low bow he invited Basil to sit down. Basil sat

down. It seemed uncivil to refuse such an invitation. The old man took up his hammer again and set to work on the boat. Basil lit his pipe and watched him for a while.

Then some one else came into the boathouse. Basil looked round and saw her—a girl, quite a young girl, and a singularly pretty girl.

She had long fair hair, which hung loose over her shoulders, though she looked old enough to have it confined on her head with hairpins. She had wonderful deep blue eyes and a complexion of dazzling clearness. Basil, in the course of his service as private secretary to Lord Edmund Troyte, had been in many lands, and, being a young man of ordinary human feelings, had looked with appreciation and interest at a great many girls of different races. He had never seen or dreamed of one so radiant as this girl who entered the boathouse. She stepped in with the air of a young goddess, and Basil noticed that, after the manner of some goddesses, she walked barefooted.

He jumped up to greet her, but before he spoke the old man poured out sentence after sentence of rapid Irish. The girl answered him in the same language, and as they talked they glanced at Basil from time to time. He understood that they were talking about him. At last they stopped speaking and both stared at him in silence. Basil felt seriously embarrassed. He was also slightly annoyed, for the girl did not seem in the least pleased to see him. Indeed, the expression of her face was both distrustful and hostile. He felt that he must say something, but could not think of very much to say.

"I suppose it's all right," he blurted out at last, "for this old fellow to be breaking up the boat."

The girl looked at him, and a frown gathered on her forehead. It seemed to Basil that she was even prettier when she frowned.

"If you told him to do it," he said, "it's all right, of course. But it seems a pity."

The old man broke in before the girl answered, and, still speaking in Irish, made what seemed to be a suggestion. The girl thought it over for a moment and then spoke to Basil.

"I suppose you're one of them," she said.

Basil had not the remotest idea what she was talking about, but he gathered from her tone and the look in her eyes that the people she referred to as "them" were distinctly objectionable. He promptly denied any connexion with them.

"No," he said. "I'm not. I never was. What's more, I wouldn't be, no matter what they offered me to make me join them."

The girl's face cleared a little.

"I was afraid you might be," she said, "though old Mahony said he was sure you weren't."

His vehement denial and old Mahony's testimony had apparently convinced her that her suspicion was unfounded. Basil turned and smiled gratefully at old Mahony, who bowed in return.

"But Dad said I was to be careful," she said, "uncommonly careful."

"Quite right," said Basil. "You can't possibly be too careful—especially——" He paused. He knew no special reason, could not guess at any sort of reason why this very pretty girl should be careful.

"Especially," he said again feebly, and then added, "But why on earth is he breaking up what seems to be a perfectly good boat?"

The girl made no attempt to answer this question.

"Old Mahony thinks," she said, "that you're just a spalpeen of a Sassenach, but I don't suppose you know what that means."

"No, I don't," said Basil. "But it doesn't sound at all complimentary."

"It means," she said, "a stray Englishman wandering about for no particular purpose. Is that what you are?"

"It is," said Basil. "That is to say, that would be a fairly good description of me, except that I'm Welsh and not English, and that I really have some business here, though it doesn't look like it."

"If you're a police officer——" said the girl.

"I'm not."

"Or a soldier?"

"I fought in the war," said Basil, "but not any more than I could possibly help, and I stopped being a soldier the very first minute I possibly could."

The girl spoke in Irish to old Mahony and then turned again to Basil with a reassuring smile.

"I've just told him," she said, "not to let any of the boys about here interfere with you. Just at present nobody in Ireland much likes the police or the soldiers, and if they thought that you were one——"

"I quite understand," said Basil; "and now would you mind telling me who you thought I was? Did you mean a policeman or a soldier when you asked me whether I was one of *them*?"

“ Oh, dear no,” said the girl. “ I shouldn’t care if you were a Chief Inspector or a Field-Marshal. Nor would old Mahony, though he pretends he would. What I thought——”

She stopped.

“ Well,” said Basil, “ what did you think I might be ? ”

“ One of my poor old Dad’s creditors,” she said. “ But you’re not. Are you ? ”

“ I can lay my hand on my heart,” said Basil, “ and swear that I never in my life lent a ten-pound note to anyone, certainly not to your father.”

The girl seemed satisfied with this strong assurance. She smiled pleasantly at Basil. Then without saying another word she took up one by one the planks knocked off the side of the boat and examined them.

CHAPTER IV

OLD Mahony drew a foot rule from his pocket. He and the girl measured the planks, laying the long ones carefully aside, throwing the shorter and the broken bits into a corner of the boat-house. For some time they took no notice of Basil. At last the girl seemed to be suddenly aware that he was still present. She turned to him and smiled.

"I say," she said, "if you're not one of Dad's creditors, why do you stand there watching me?"

Basil felt that if Dad's creditors were men of taste they would certainly want to stand watching the girl as long as they could. He wanted to do that himself. But he could not very well say so, and he found it very difficult to answer the question put to him.

"I'll go away if you like," he said at last.

"I'm going away myself now," she said, "and I really don't think you ought to stay here watching old Mahony. I dare say you're all right; but I can't afford to take any risks."

"If you're going away," said Basil, "perhaps you will allow me to see you home."

From her reference to her father's debts and creditors, he guessed that she must be the daughter of Sir Amos Coppinger, whose story Royce had told

him. Lishreen House—Royce had pointed it out to him—was a mile away at least. He looked forward to a pleasant walk. But Miss Coppinger took no notice of his suggestion. She began to talk to old Mahony in Irish. She seemed to be giving him orders of some kind. The old man evidently intended to obey them.

“Now,” she said at last, “come along.”

Basil picked up his rod, net, and gaff. Finally, outside the door of the boathouse, he picked up his salmon.

“That’s a good fish,” said Miss Coppinger.

“I shall be very glad if you’ll accept it,” said Basil, “and allow me to carry it home for you.”

“I don’t think I really want it,” she said. “You see, we get precious little to eat except salmon and lobsters. I can catch as many of them as I like. And, of course, there are potatoes. We don’t have meat because we’re so deadly poor, on account of Dad’s creditors, you know.”

Basil understood the potato part of the diet. The indigent often find potatoes the cheapest of food. Salmon and lobsters struck him for a moment as curious things for the very poor to eat. He had always been accustomed to think of them as luxuries of the rich.

“All the same,” she said, “I might perhaps take a bit of the salmon. There may be nothing to eat at home to-night, except potatoes and tea. Even salmon would be an improvement on that. Supposing we roast it? That’s to say if you’re not in a tearing hurry to get anywhere.”

Basil was in no hurry at all to get away from Miss

Coppinger, but he hoped that he was not expected to roast the salmon. He had no idea at all how to do that.

"We have to make a fire, of course," she said. "Just run back to the boathouse and get some wood from old Mahony."

"But," said Basil, "I can't talk Irish. He won't understand what I want."

"Oh, yes, he will," she said. "Mahony lives out on an island all by himself, but he can talk English just as well as you can. Only he won't do it, of course, before strangers. That's what Dad calls his protective instinct. Perhaps you know what that means. I don't. But I do know that it has something to do with rabbits living in holes and crabs being the same colour as seaweedy rocks."

Basil got an armful of broken wood from Mahony without difficulty. The old man had apparently accepted him as a friend. Miss Coppinger built a fire and set large stones around it. She took Basil's knife and cut some of the wood into skewers.

"Now," she said, "if you don't mind turning your back for a bit I'll roast the salmon."

Basil wondered whether it could be necessary for her to take off any of her clothes in order to roast the salmon. He could think of no other reason for asking him to turn his back. Being a modest young man he obeyed her immediately. He even walked off to a little hillock some distance from the shore of the lake.

Ten minutes later she joined him there.

"Sorry to have hunted you away," she said, "but I simply daren't let you see how I roast the salmon."

It's a secret that some of the old fishermen know and nobody else does. I coaxed Mahony to tell me, and I'm the only woman in the whole world who knows. Rather grand for me, isn't it? "

"Very," said Basil.

"It makes me feel like the lady who's buried in Cork Cathedral, near the pulpit. You know the one I mean."

Basil did not. He had never been in Cork Cathedral, and had a vague idea that only the most eminent saints are buried near pulpits. No doubt anyone who can cook a salmon in a particularly delicious way deserves high honour both in Church and State, but——

"I forget her name for the moment," said Miss Coppinger, "but she managed to become a Free Mason, and found out their most dreaded secrets, though not I expect anything so useful as this way of cooking salmon. By the way, how do you come to be fishing in this river? It's supposed to be Dad's, though it isn't really, you know, having been taken from him by oppressors. Are you a poacher? "

"Certainly not," said Basil stiffly.

He disliked being called a poacher even more than being described as a "spalpeen Englishman."

"Well, there's nothing to get angry about," said Miss Coppinger. "There are much worse things than poachers. Creditors, for instance. They're the oppressors who have taken the river from Dad."

"It was Mr. Royce who invited me to fish," said Basil.

"Oh, Charlie Royce. He's not a bad sort, though he is more or less against Dad; and would be more

if he knew what we are doing. But, of course, I can't tell you that. It's another secret, like the way to roast salmon."

"I wish I could help you," said Basil.

He felt at the moment that he would be glad to help the girl who sat beside him, no matter what she did. He would help her to commit a crime, and take all the blame afterwards with pleasure.

Miss Coppinger sat in front of him with her hands clasped round her knees. Her bare feet looked very white against the green grass. She looked at him long and searchingly.

"Can you make a packing-case?" she asked at last.

"I've never tried," said Basil; "but I expect I could if I had some wood and nails."

"There's wood enough," said Mary. "At least, I think there must be. It ought to be possible to make a pretty big packing-case out of a boat."

"Oh," said Basil, "that's why you're breaking up the boat."

"Exactly. I had no other wood—so I had to use the boat. Mahony can break it up all right, but I am not at all sure that he can make it into a packing-case afterwards."

"I'll try, if you like," said Basil.

"Do," she said; "but first you must swear the solemnest kind of oath that you won't ask what the packing-case is for or try to find out."

"I swear," said Basil.

"Good. I'll trust you. It's to be so long."

She stood up as she spoke, pushed her big toe into the grass, walked about six feet and dug her toe in again.

"And about this broad."

This time she marked out a rather shorter space, again using her toe.

"By the time you've finished," she said, "the salmon will be roasted."

She led Basil back to the boathouse. Mahony, who seemed to know what he was at, was nailing the planks together. Mary spoke a few words to him, and he admitted Basil as a fellow-worker. He seemed almost to welcome him. There were certain difficulties to be overcome. Planks of wood taken from the sides of a boat are curved, and cannot readily be straightened. They are more suitable for making into barrels than packing-cases. Indeed, when finished, the case was very curious to look at. Basil hoped that Miss Coppinger wanted to pack up something not absolutely rigid. A carpet, or even a mattress might be got into a curved packing-case. A table could not.

Mahony seemed fairly well pleased with the work, but when Miss Coppinger came back to the boat-house she looked at it doubtfully. She carried the salmon in her hand. It made a neat, tidy parcel, wrapped in reeds and grasses, which were tied round it, much neater and tidier than the packing-case.

"I suppose," she said, "that's the best you can manage. It may do. I don't say it will; but I'll try. Here's your fish," she added to Basil. "I haven't taken any of it for myself after all; for I've just remembered that Mahony has brought me in a bit of bacon, and I'd rather have that. I expect Dad would, too."

"I wish," said Basil, "that you'd let me give you a ham."

"Have you got one?" said Mary. "I don't believe you have. You don't look like a man who'd have a ham."

"I could easily buy one," said Basil.

"That wouldn't do at all. If you bought a ham and gave it to me you'd be one of Dad's creditors, wouldn't you?"

"No, I shouldn't. I'd give you the ham, not lend it."

"They all begin by talking like that," said Miss Coppinger, "but in the end it turns out that they're charging what Dad calls usury. So now you may go home."

"But mayn't I walk back with you?" said Basil.

"No, you mayn't. Mahony and I have to make arrangements about that packing-case, and if you came with us you might find out what it's for, which is what you swore not to do. I wouldn't like to break that swear, and I'm sure you'd feel bad afterwards yourself if you did."

As a man of honour—and he prided himself on being that—Basil had no choice. He left Miss Coppinger with old Mahony and walked sadly off towards the village. He looked round several times to see if they were following him. But they remained in the boathouse until he was out of sight.

CHAPTER V

AFTER leaving Basil on the road with the fishing gear Royce drove straight to Lishreen House. He had a very disagreeable interview before him. It is not pleasant to have to tell a man to turn out of his house, to leave his furniture behind him and go out into the world destitute, save for such petty allowance as his creditors may make him. It is particularly unpleasant to deliver a message of the kind to a man like Sir Amos Coppinger.

Sir Amos had never at any time of his life been a submissive or a gentle man. Of late years he had been so tortured with gout, rheumatism, and debts that his temper was very bad and he was inclined to use violent language with very slight provocation. It was Royce's duty to give him very considerable provocation. He did not at all look forward to listening to the language.

It occurred to him that he might perhaps do his business through Lady Coppinger, give her the message of warning, and leave her to bear the weight of Sir Amos's fury. He was not in the least afraid of Lady Coppinger. She would probably weep, but then she always did weep about everything that happened to her, and Charlie Royce was quite unaffected by her tears.

He turned his car into the yard at the back of the

house and knocked at the kitchen door. The kitchen had been Lady Coppinger's domain before she married. It continued afterwards to be the only part of the house in which she was at home. Sir Amos still treated her as a servant, and would no more have thought of inviting her to sit down in the smoking-room when she was Lady Coppinger than when she was Biddy Nolan.

Charlie Royce knocked, and then knocked again. There was no reply. He opened the door and walked in. There was nobody in the kitchen. A kettle was simmering on the fire. A large pile of plates, the accumulation of several meals, stood unwashed on the table. Some dirty clothes were soaking in a tub of water near the door. Lady Coppinger was not there, but it would have been plain to anyone who knew her that the kitchen was hers.

Royce knew his way about the house. He went through the door of the kitchen into a long stone-paved passage. As he passed along it he heard voices, two voices which he did not recognize, and above them Sir Amos's voice. It was evident that Sir Amos was exceedingly angry about something. Royce paused. He had no wish to plunge suddenly into a fray which he did not understand.

A minute or two later Lady Coppinger came along the passage towards the kitchen sobbing in grief and terror. When she saw Charlie Royce she stopped.

"For the love of God, Mr. Royce," she said, "will you go into the smoking-room or there'll be murder done. He has a stick by him and I wouldn't say but he might have a gun. He'll have both the two of

them killed in a minute without something's done to stop it."

Charlie Royce moved a step or two forward in response to her appeal. But there was no need for him to go to the rescue of Sir Amos's two victims. They fled of their own accord. They did not stop to speak or even to look at Charlie Royce, but bolted headlong to the kitchen. Royce could hear them a moment later running across the yard outside. It seemed likely enough, that they would run all the way down the long avenue. Although they had taken no notice of Royce he recognized them as they passed. They were Cohen and his friend.

After them, though with small chance of overtaking them, came Sir Amos. Rage had enabled him to do what in calmer moments he said he could not do, leave his chair. He hobbled down the passage with one foot grotesquely bandaged. He stopped now and then to flourish his stick. He had not, as his wife feared, got a gun; but the stick was thick and heavy. He might easily have killed Cohen with it if he had happened to hit him on a thin part of his skull.

Sir Amos, in spite of his anger, realized the hopelessness of the pursuit and stopped when he saw Royce.

"Damn it, Charlie," he said, "what do you mean by letting those two swine loose on me? I always thought you had some decent feeling although you are a lawyer. But it's an infernally shabby thing to turn on those two to worry me in my own house, as long as it is my own. I know you're going to turn me out of it; but while I'm in it I'll have it to

myself and I'll not have oily moneylenders coming into my room and talking through their noses at me."

"I assure you, Sir Amos," said Royce, "I didn't send them. It's the last thing I'd think of doing."

"They may be my creditors," said Sir Amos, "but——"

"So far as I know they're not creditors at all. Young Cohen certainly isn't. The other fellow may have got hold of some bill I know nothing about, but I don't believe he has. What did they want here?"

Sir Amos's anger subsided. He was beginning to feel the consequences of moving about. A sharp pain shot through his right foot. He groaned.

"Give me your arm, Charlie," he said, "and help me back to my chair."

Lady Coppinger, wiping her eyes with her apron, came through the kitchen door. She and Royce, one on each side of Sir Amos, supported him back to his chair in the smoking-room. He was not in the least grateful to either of them.

"Get away out of this, Biddy," he said. "I want to talk to Mr. Royce."

"Now, Charlie," he said, when his wife had gone, "if it wasn't you who sent those two scoundrels here, who was it?"

"I don't know," said Royce. "I don't know anything about them except that Cohen, the younger one—he's one of those fellows that sell tea—called on me this morning with a proposal that he should be allowed to take over what he wanted of the furniture of your house at a valuation before the auction.

A d——d cheeky proposal I call it, and I sent him off with a flea in his ear."

"Oh! he was at you too, then?" said Sir Amos.

"If that was what he was proposing to you he was suggesting what he jolly well knew you'd no right to do. You can't sell a stick out of this place now."

Sir Amos, whose foot had ceased to pain him for the moment, chuckled.

"I know that," he said, "and as an honest man—I'm the soul of honour, you know, Charlie, and I'm most scrupulous about the rights of my creditors; I wouldn't do them out of a penny that belongs to them—I gave Mr. Cohen a bit of my mind in very plain language."

Royce reflected. Sir Amos's language had been plain to the point of violence. He had, apparently, threatened Cohen and his friend with instant death. They had gone off in terror of their lives. But it was difficult to believe that Sir Amos had been moved entirely by a scrupulous sense of honour. Royce knew the old man well, and had good reason to suppose that neither honour nor honesty was particularly dear to him.

"What beats me," said Royce, "is what those two fellows wanted."

He looked round the room as he spoke. There was not, so far as he could see, anything in it to excite the cupidity even of a dealer in second-hand furniture.

The furniture was of that unfortunate kind which is neither old enough to be regarded as "antique" nor sufficiently new to be worth much for use. The chairs, besides being ugly, were exceedingly dilapi-

dated. The only one in which it would have been possible to be moderately comfortable was that which Sir Amos used. It had once been the sort of chair which is to be found in the smoking-rooms of clubs, but its leather cover was torn in various places, its springs were broken, and the wood of the legs was badly chipped. The carpet was worn into holes. A mahogany table—once, no doubt, handsome—was stained and deeply scratched. At the two or three pictures on the walls Royce did not even glance.

“As you’re acting for the creditors,” said Sir Amos, chuckling, “you might just mention to them what jolly good care I’m taking of their interests. Cohen and that fantastic fellow he had with him offered me—but perhaps I’d better not tell you what they offered me.”

Royce had some difficulty in believing that Cohen and his friend had made any bid at all for the furniture of the room. He found it impossible to believe that Sir Amos had refused an offer, even if it only amounted to £5. He was puzzled. The one thing clear to him about the matter was that Sir Amos had been in a violent rage, excited by something his visitors had said or done.

Half an hour later he was more puzzled still. He went out to the kitchen, and found Lady Coppinger there. She had stopped crying, and was steadying her nerves with a cup of strong tea.

“Mr. Royce,” she said, “you was always a good friend to us. Sorra the better friend I’ve had since the misfortunate day of my marriage. It’s a kind heart you have and always had, and I’d trust you

with the last penny I possessed, and so would anyone else in the country."

Charlie Royce had never been particularly friendly with Lady Coppinger. He had always rather disliked and rather despised the helpless, shiftless woman. He suspected now that she wanted something from him. She would hardly have heaped so much undeserved praise on him without some object in view.

"Them two gentlemen that was here this minute," she said; "the same two that Sir Amos hunted out of the house and might have murdered. Do you know what it was they wanted?"

Royce knew very well what they wanted, the furniture of the smoking-room. He did not know why they wanted it. He hoped that Lady Coppinger would be able to tell him that.

"They came to me," she said, "as polite as you please, and I will say it for young Cohen, that he's always polite when he does be round with the cart selling the tea. But he was politer nor ever this time, and so was the other gentleman. 'Don't breathe a word to a soul,' says they, 'about what we're offering you.' And maybe now I shouldn't be telling you, Mr. Royce, for says I to them, 'You'll not catch me talking.'"

"You may tell me," said Royce. "I'm a lawyer, and telling me things doesn't matter any more than if I was a priest or a doctor."

"Well, they said—and it was the eldest of the two that was speaking—'we'll give you £20 for what's in the room Sir Amos sits in, and what's more,' says they, 'we'll pay you money down.' And with that young Mr. Cohen takes £20 out of his pocket in Bank

of Ireland notes and counts them out on to the kitchen table. Now what do you think of that ? ”

“ I think it was a mighty good offer,” said Royce, “ and I wonder you didn’t close with it there and then. Though of course you’ve no right to. You know that. What’s in that room belongs to the creditors, the same as everything else in the house.”

“ It wasn’t thinking of the creditors stopped me from taking the money.”

“ I’m sure it wasn’t,” said Royce.

“ It’s little e’er a one of them creditors ever did for us,” said Lady Coppinger, “ so why would I be refusing good money for the sake of them. No, but what stopped me was this. How could I sell them things without Sir Amos knowing ? But that didn’t trouble me much, for I was full sure he’d be as glad to get the money as what I would. So says I to them, ‘ Come along in now and make that offer to Sir Amos, and there’s no doubt you’ll get what you want.’ Well, they looked at one another, and young Mr. Cohen put the notes back in his pocket, and I was in dread of my life they’d walk off. But ‘ Come on then,’ says the other gentleman, ‘ let’s try anyway. Well, I took them to where Sir Amos was sitting, and I could see that the two of them was looking round them, the same as if they was trying to make out just what was in the room, and thinks I to myself, if they’re as smart as all that they’ll never offer the £20. But, believe me or not as you like, they did. And what do you think happened ? ”

“ I don’t think at all. I know. Sir Amos flew into a rage.”

“ Not at the first go off, he didn’t,” said Lady

Coppinger, "but he refused the £20, as polite as you please, the same as I might refuse 2s. for a chicken when I thought I ought to have got more for it. Well, I got the turn of my life then. 'I'll give you £50,' said the other gentleman, not Mr. Cohen, and with that Sir Amos started cursing and damning and threatening to kill the two of them, and——"

"I know the rest of the story," said Royce. "They ran for their lives."

"They legged it, and that's a fact," said Lady Coppinger, "and now, Mr. Royce, do you think you could get them back again? It's yourself could do it if anyone could, and you might tell them that if they come any time after eleven o'clock to-night when Sir Amos will be in his bed——"

"I'll do no such thing," said Royce. "You seem to forget that I'm acting for your husband's creditors, and as I happen to be more or less an honest man——"

"Musha, the Lord save you," said Lady Coppinger, "you and your honesty."

CHAPTER VI

“IF you’d stop talking about that girl for one single minute,” said Royce, “I’d tell you something really interesting.”

He and Basil were sitting together at dinner in the “Lishreen Hotel.” They were eating the salmon which Miss Coppinger had roasted on the banks of the river. They were eating it with great pleasure, for they were both hungry. Also, no salmon is better cooked than by the secret recipe of the West of Ireland fishermen. Royce ought to have been grateful to the man who caught the fish and grateful enough to the girl who cooked it to listen to her praises for an hour without feeling bored. Basil was too good-tempered, and—in spite of the fact that he was private secretary to a statesman—too simple-minded to feel angry when his raptures were snubbed. He was simply a little surprised.

“But,” he said, “she’s the prettiest girl I’ve ever seen. She’s actually lovely.”

“Pretty girls aren’t nearly so important as you think they are,” said Royce, “and if you were married you’d know that. I used to feel just like you about them, and thought that nothing in the world mattered in the least if a good-looking one smiled at me. But after I married I found out that girls aren’t half as

interesting as lots of other things. That's why I advise you to get married, so that you'll be able to think about the other things a bit."

Basil, who was beginning to get used to Royce's chatter, did not listen to half this speech.

"It isn't simply that she's very good-looking," he said. "I feel frightfully sorry for her. It was pathetic to hear her talking about her father's poverty. I wish to goodness I could do anything to help her."

Just then Mr. Cohen and his friend came into the room. They sat down at the other end of the table, waiting for their meal. From time to time they glanced at Royce. Occasionally they whispered to each other. Their peering and whispering seemed to get on Royce's nerves.

"Come along," he said to Basil, "let's go off somewhere else for our smoke."

The "Lishreen Hotel" does not offer much accommodation to its guests; but there are a few chairs in the entrance hall. Royce and Basil took two of them and lit their pipes.

"You were saying just now," said Royce, "that you'd like to help Mary Coppinger if you could, on account of her being so good-looking."

Basil did not like the way in which Royce spoke of Miss Coppinger by her Christian name. He answered rather stiffly.

"I'd help her just the same whether she was good-looking or not. I'm sorry for a girl placed in her position."

Royce looked at him with a sceptical smile.

"I'd want to help any girl," said Basil, "who was being bullied by a lot of heartless moneylenders."

"Well," said Royce, "I don't know that I can actually promise you a chance of rescuing the fair Mary out of a dragon's mouth, but if it would be any satisfaction to you to dig a knife into a rather slimy monster I think I can put you in the way of doing it."

"I wish to goodness you'd talk sense," said Basil. "I've never in my life met anyone who babbled the way you do. What on earth do you mean by gassing about dragons?"

"You saw those two fellows who came into the room just as we were finishing dinner," said Royce.

"Yes. One was the man who travelled over with me from London. The other——"

"The other is Cohen, the tea man. Well, I told you before I thought those two were up to some mischief. I'm quite sure about it now."

"Anything to do with Miss Coppinger?"

"It has something to do with the house she lives in," said Royce, "and something to do with her father and her mother, so I expect it will more or less affect her. The trouble is that I can't for the life of me make out what it is they're after."

He gave Basil an account of his visit to Lishreen House in the afternoon. He repeated the story of Cohen's curious request that morning.

"It's pretty obvious," he said, "that there's something in the house which those two think is valuable, and their idea is to steal a march on the creditors and get it before anyone else finds out about it."

"That's simple robbery," said Basil.

"Exactly. And as I'm looking after the creditors' interests I mean to stop it if I can. But I don't know what they want. Lady Coppinger doesn't

know either. She'd have let it out to me this afternoon if she'd known. But I'm not sure about Sir Amos. I'm inclined to think he does know, and I shouldn't wonder if he meant to spoof the creditors, too, and get the valuable, whatever it is, hidden away safe somewhere before the sale. Now I can't have that. Everything in that house at the present moment belongs to the creditors, and it's my job to see that they get what's theirs. They're mostly moneylenders of the worst kind, and they deserve to get stuck. Still, the law's the law, you know."

It struck Basil that Royce's profession of respect for the law came rather oddly from a man who had been robbing the very same creditors of the rent of the fishing. Perhaps some feeling of the same kind entered Royce's mind. He looked up with an engaging smile.

"Anyhow," he said, "I don't want Cohen to score. If Sir Amos succeeds in swindling the moneylenders I shan't be too sorry, though, of course, I won't help him. In fact, I'll try to stop him. Still, for the sake of the daughter and the mother, who's a decent poor soul, I won't try very hard. But I will put a stop to Cohen's little game if I can. The question is, will you stand in to help?"

"I will, of course," said Basil.

His sympathies were entirely with the disreputable Sir Amos. But he would scarcely have been willing to mix himself up in a very doubtful business for the sake of an old baronet whom he had never seen. He gave his promise of help enthusiastically, because he suddenly remembered what it was that Mary Coppinger and old Mahony were doing in the boat-

house. He himself had helped in the making of the packing-case.

Mary evidently intended to carry off something from Lishreen House. It must, he reflected, be something large. The packing-case measured six feet by four feet. No doubt she and Cohen wanted the same thing. Royce did not know what it was, and none of the creditors so much as suspected its existence. He wondered if he ought to tell Royce about the boathouse and what had been made there. The lawyer would not, he felt sure, go out of his way to interfere with Mary and Sir Amos ; but if the packing-case were, so to speak, laid down in front of him he would be almost bound to ask what was in it.

While he hesitated Cohen and his friend came out of the dining-room. They paused in the hall to light their cigars, and then passed out of the hotel. Royce touched Basil's arm. They rose quietly and followed them.

CHAPTER VII

THEY were met at the door of the hotel with a rush of rain against their faces. The wind had shifted from south to south-west, and was sweeping in from the Atlantic, bringing with it clouds of warm moisture.

"This settles it, anyhow," said Royce, steadying himself against a gust which caught him as he reached the road. Basil heard him and misunderstood. He supposed that Royce thought the night was too bad, that he meant to go back to the hotel and give up the pursuit of Cohen and his friend.

"You can go back if you like," he shouted. "I'll go on."

"I wasn't thinking of going back," said Royce. "Quite the contrary. I'm much keener to go now than I was before. Don't you see that if those two town-bred clerks of fellows go out on a night like this they must be up to something which they regard as devilish important? If it had been a fine night they might have just been going for a stroll, and we'd have made fools of ourselves following them. But in this weather—— Come on."

He took Basil by the arm, and together they stumbled along the road, half running, half walking, splashing through deep pools of water. Four hundred yards

or so from the door of the hotel the road divides. To the left it runs inland, passes a small group of cabins, then climbs a hill and joins the main road to Carnew. The right fork follows the shore of the bay, bending westward till it comes to the gate of Lishreen House. After that it ceases to be a road and becomes a mere track, wandering along to the ruin of a square tower, built on the last point of the land.

Royce and Basil travelled fast—very fast considering the darkness, the storm, and the rain. But Cohen and his friend must have gone equally fast, or faster, and they had a couple of minutes' start. Royce stopped, puzzled, at the fork of the road. There was no one in sight, and it was impossible to hear footsteps. The storm swept all sounds away, and the lashing of the sea close at hand would have drowned the noise of a marching army.

"Well," said Royce, "we've got to guess which way they've gone."

"Where are we?" said Basil.

Royce explained their position. Basil, as soon as he understood it, decided to take the road which led to Lishreen House.

"They're bound to be going there," he said, "if they're trying to steal anything from Sir Amos."

"I see that," said Royce, "but what bothers me is——"

"Anyhow, if they've gone the other way it doesn't matter to us what they're doing, and we needn't follow them. All that we want is to see that no harm comes to Miss Coppinger."

"I see that point all right, but there's one thing that bothers me——"

"Oh, come on," said Basil. "They may be doing anything while we stand talking here."

"Very well," said Royce, "but you'll see in a minute why I don't believe they've taken this road."

Basil did see, and was almost convinced that the men he was seeking must have gone the other way.

The road which runs from the village to the gate of Lishreen House keeps close to the edge of the sea. At high spring tides the water rises to the level of the road, and lies on it in pools. When a westerly gale and a spring tide come together the water is piled up in the bay, and then it flows right across the road, totally submerging it.

Basil was struggling along a few yards ahead of Royce. He suddenly tripped, stumbled, and fell. He found himself under water. He scrambled to his feet and spat out a mouthful of water.

"Salt," he said. "We're in the sea."

"The sea is over the road," said Royce. "I knew it would be at this point. That's why I said those two men wouldn't come this way. The fellow with the fur coat and scented handkerchief is certain to hate cold water, and Cohen wouldn't face it at this time of night."

"They wouldn't have faced it if they'd known what was before them," said Basil. "But perhaps they didn't know any more than I did. Come on."

They held hands to steady each other and waded on.

"There's a deepish ditch on each side of us," said Royce, "and if we step off the road we'll have to swim for it. Good Lord! To think that I'm going through all this to save a lot of ruffianly moneylenders from being robbed!"

Basil was going through it to save Mary Coppinger from—he was not quite sure what he was trying to save her from ; but the storm raging round him, the rush of the water past his legs and the strong effort required to keep himself from falling made him feel heroic and romantic.

The road rose slowly under their feet. The water grew shallower, and in a few minutes they were standing on ground which the sea had not reached. They came to the gate of Lishreen House. The tall stone piers were dimly discernible in the darkness. The ruins of a gate lodge showed as a blacker patch against the black background. The gates stood open day and night, hanging forlornly on broken hinges. Along the sides of the avenue grew stunted alder trees, windswept and bent shorewards. Beyond these trees lay the house. A light burned in one room and shone through an uncurtained window.

“The old man hasn’t gone to bed yet,” said Royce. “That’s his smoking-room. There doesn’t seem to be much the matter, does there? I never thought Cohen would face the road to-night. They must have gone the other way, and we’ve missed them. However, now we’re this far we may as well go on a bit.”

They approached the house and turned off through a thicket of laurel bushes towards the lighted window.

“I say,” said Basil, “do you notice that the lower half of the window is open? Now, I wonder why anyone would leave a window open on a night like this.”

“Must be uncommonly fond of fresh air,” said Royce. “Or else——”

"Or else some one has forced the window open and climbed in," said Basil. "Do you think——?"

He stopped abruptly, horror-struck at the thought of what might have happened in that lighted room. A helpless old man murdered, a girl stabbed or bludgeoned. Anything seemed possible.

"If you're thinking of murder," said Royce, "you may make your mind easy. Whatever else has happened, that hasn't. I know young Cohen, and he hasn't the guts to kill a cat."

"Come on and let's see," said Basil. "We can easily get under the window and look in."

He dragged Royce through the laurel bushes.

"You needn't worry," said Royce. "If you'd seen old Coppinger chasing those two this afternoon, you'd know that they simply daren't tackle him even if he was in bed and asleep. As for their murdering Mary—why, that girl would knock spots out of them with one hand tied behind her back. She's as strong as a young heifer."

"Hush!" said Basil.

They were close under the open window, but caution was quite unnecessary. The wind was howling round the house so fiercely that Royce could scarcely have been heard inside if he had shouted. They stood upright and peered into the room. Old Sir Amos sat in his chair beside the fire-place. On the table beside him stood a lamp, a tumbler, and a whisky bottle. He sat very still, and save for the fact that he was slowly smoking a pipe it might have been supposed that he was asleep.

The two young men dropped down again among the laurel bushes and crept away.

"Nothing doing," said Royce. "The old man is spending a quiet evening much as he always does. The mother and the daughter have probably gone to bed."

They walked back along the avenue.

"Cohen and the play actor haven't been near the house at all," said Royce. "I was pretty sure they wouldn't attempt that walk through the water. The fur coat would have been ruined and all the scent washed off that fellow's pocket handkerchief. We ought to have gone after them the other way. Then we might have found out what they're doing. As things stand we've got abominably wet and wasted our evening."

But they had not entirely wasted it. While he was still speaking a light, faint and flickering, appeared in front of them on the avenue. It was a moving light, swung to and fro, evidently carried in the hand of some one who was walking. It came nearer to them, but very slowly.

"A stable lantern," said Royce; "one of those old-fashioned lanterns with a handle in it. Now I wonder why the devil they've brought a lantern with them."

It did not occur to him or to Basil that the approaching light could belong to anyone except Cohen and his friend.

"We mustn't let them pass us," said Basil.

Their plan was a perfectly simple one. Basil took his stand among the alder trees on one side of the avenue. Royce stood opposite him, invisible in the shadow of the trees.

The light approached very slowly. Sometimes

it stopped altogether as if the carrier had paused to rest. Then it moved on again. Basil stood motionless and tense with excitement, waiting till the coming men were abreast of him, ready to spring out and seize them. The light was nearly opposite him when an unusually violent gust of wind swept along the avenue, driving before it a torrent of rain. The flickering lamp went out. Basil hesitated an instant in the total darkness, and then sprang forward towards the place where he had last seen the light. He guessed the distance and direction well. He came up against some one, flung his arms round a struggling figure, stumbled and rolled over on the ground, holding his captive tight.

CHAPTER VIII

BASIL'S captive struggled fiercely, fighting with great strength and activity. They rolled together on the ground. Basil was struck on the cheek, struck on the point of the chin, punched on the breast, but he held on with determination. After a while he shifted his grip so as to pinion the arms that struck at him. As he did so his captive wriggled convulsively, writhed and slipped from his grasp. He made a despairing clutch, and found himself with his head in a pool of water, grasping a shoe.

Royce hailed him out of the darkness.

"Got your man, Price?"

Basil rose to his feet, still clinging to the shoe.

"I missed mine," said Royce. "I sprang at him, but he must have better eyes than mine in the dark. He met me with a straight punch like the kick of a mule, right between the eyes, and I went down. He got off, of course. I was lying with my head on the lantern. I fancy he threw it at me before he hit out."

Basil was feeling the shoe which he held, turning it over and over in his hands.

"If you've got the lantern light it," he said.

"It's all very well talking of lighting lanterns,"

said Royce. "There's not a dry spot on me anywhere, and I should say my matches are pulp."

They evidently were, or, at all events, the heads of them were. He rubbed half a dozen of them on the side of the box and then threw the rest away.

"No use," he said. "We'd better go back to the house and see what the ruffians are at."

Royce was a man of courage. The adventures of the evening, even the knock-down blow he received, had not quelled his spirits.

"I'm not going up to the house again," said Basil.

"Had enough?" said Royce. "I say, did your man maul you very badly?"

"Mine wasn't a man at all," said Basil. "It was a girl. I've got her shoe in my hand."

"Good Lord," said Price. "A girl! What girl?"

"How can I tell you what girl?" said Basil. "All I know about her is that I'd rather fight most men. She was infernally strong and active."

"It can't have been a girl," said Royce.

"It was. I'll bring you the shoe and let you feel it. Where are you?"

It was as dark as ever. Basil stepped out in the direction of Royce's voice. He stepped too confidently and too quickly. His foot caught on something on the road, and he fell again.

The shower blew over, and with it the extreme darkness passed. It became possible for Basil to see dimly that he had tripped and fallen over a large wooden box which lay beside him on the road. He peered at it. He reached over to it and felt it with his hands. He satisfied himself about the shape of it.

"Royce," he said, "the girl I fought with was Miss Coppinger."

"Oh, if you fought with her," said Royce, "I don't wonder that you got the worst of it. But how the devil do you know?"

"I know," said Basil, "because I'm kneeling on top of a packing-case that I made for her myself this afternoon."

"Packing-case? Packing-case? I say, old man, she seems to have knocked you silly. We'd better give up this chase for to-night. You ought to be in bed. Come back to the hotel."

They walked back together, Royce holding Basil by the arm. They forded the flooded road without disaster, struggled to the cross-roads, were caught by a fierce gust and swept along the last few yards of their way up to the door of the hotel.

A light was still burning in the hall when they entered. Cohen and his friend were sitting comfortably in the chairs which Basil and Royce had left a few hours earlier. Royce, one of whose eyes was swelling fast, passed them with a scowl, dragging Basil after him.

"That damned Cohen," he said when they got upstairs, "had the insolence to grin at me."

CHAPTER IX

BASIL was wakened next morning by a loud knocking at his bedroom door. The hotel porter, a red-headed and red-faced young man whom every one called Mick, walked in without waiting to receive permission.

"There's a gentleman wishing to speak to you, sir," he said.

Basil could think of no gentleman in Lishreen, except Royce, who could possibly have any business with him.

"Is it Mr. Royce?" he asked.

"It is not, sir," said Mick. "Mr. Royce was up and out of this in his motor-car an hour ago, with a lump under his left eye the size of a small potato. The gentleman who wants to see you isn't just what you might call a gentleman at all, not like yourself, sir, or Mr. Royce."

"He'll have to wait till I'm dressed, whoever he is," said Basil.

He glanced at the clothes he had taken off the night before. They lay about, some on the floor, some on chairs. Round or beneath them all were small pools of water. The clothes themselves were still soaked.

"I don't know," said Mick confidentially, "that

I'd be putting them clothes on if I were you, not till they're dried anyway. Mr. Royce's clothes are down at the kitchen fire this minute, and the cook cursing like mad with the streams of water that's running on the floor."

"I thought you said Mr. Royce had gone off in his car."

"I did say that and it's the truth. It was in his pyjamas he went. But sure that'll do him no harm at all. It's a fine morning after the storm, thanks be to God!"

"You'd better take my clothes down and dry them if you can, and tell the gentleman that if he wants to see me at once he must come up here. I'm not going to walk about all over the place in my pyjamas, whatever Mr. Royce may do. And bring me up some breakfast, will you, as soon as the gentleman goes away. Anything will do."

Mick gathered up the soaking garments and went to the door. Having opened it he at once closed it again and stepped softly over to Basil's bed.

"Any friend of Mr. Royce's," he said, "is a friend of mine."

He spoke in a confidential whisper, as if he were imparting a dangerous secret. Basil stared at him.

"And I'll say the same to you as I'd say to Mr. Royce if it was him that was lying in that bed in front of me. Let you mind yourself with the boy that's coming up to see you."

"Why?" said Basil.

"I'm saying nothing against him, mind that, now," said Mick. "I've known him off and on coming to this hotel for the last five years, and I've nothing

against him. Only I happen to know where he was last night and who he was colloquing with. So if I were you I'd be on the look-out. I won't say another word now, so it's no use asking me. Nor I wouldn't have said that much—for it doesn't suit a man in my position to be talking about what he knows—only that you're a friend of Mr. Royce's, and he's a gentleman that I like."

After that Mick really left the room. A few minutes later there was another tap at the door, and Mr. Cohen walked in.

He was most suave and polite. He began commenting on the extreme severity of the weather the night before. He hoped that Basil had not caught cold. He offered some tabloids of ammoniated quinine, producing a little bottle from his pocket. Then he got down to business.

"I received a letter this morning," he said, "from Mr. Royce, or, rather, I suppose, from Mr. Royce's clerk, threatening me with legal proceedings if I do not return to you a salmon rod which he said I stole."

Basil felt exceedingly uncomfortable. He began an apology and stopped short when met by the difficulty of inventing any plausible explanation of Royce's letter. At last he said feebly:

"Oh, that's all right. Don't bother about it. It's quite all right."

Mr. Cohen, oddly enough, did not seem in the least angry or even annoyed about the matter.

"I quite understand your action," he said coolly. "It would be convenient, very convenient for you, if I and my friend, Mr. Kaitcer, were out of your way. But Mr. Royce's methods are a little crude.

He cannot imprison us on this ridiculous charge, and you may believe me, Mr. Price, when I say that he is not likely to frighten us."

Basil was a good deal puzzled by this speech. He was also thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"I assure you," he said, "I assure you that the letter was simply a joke, a silly kind of joke, of course. I quite see now how silly it was; but it was never meant to inconvenience you."

"Ah," said Mr. Cohen, "these jokes. Long as I've lived in Ireland I've never understood these jokes. Perhaps it was as another joke that you went out to Lishreen House last night in the storm and waded through the sea to get there. Ah, you see, we know; or, at least, we can guess. We guessed when you took the right-hand fork of the road instead of the left.

"Yes, I'm being quite frank with you. My friend and I waited for you where the road forks, and we saw which way you went. We know more than that, Mr. Price. We know that you were not successful. You brought nothing back with you."

"I don't know what on earth you're talking about," said Basil. "Successful. Successful in what?"

His eyes rested on the girl's shoe he had brought home with him the night before. Mick had not taken it away to dry it. It was still on the dressing-table, an odd-looking ornament, between his brushes and his razor. He had certainly brought back that shoe. Either Mr. Cohen knew nothing about it or he did not regard the capture of the shoe as success.

"I think," said Mr. Cohen gently, "I really think you do know what I'm talking about. I think that

when a gentleman comes all the way from London to Lishreen he comes for something. And if he happens to be the private secretary of Lord Edmund Troyte—well, it is not difficult to guess what he has come for.”

“If you think that my visit here has anything to do with politics——” said Basil.

The suggestion seemed obvious enough. Lord Edmund Troyte was an eminent statesman. But Mr. Cohen waved it away.

“Your politics,” he said, “are as incomprehensible to me as your jokes.”

“If you really want to know,” said Basil, “I came here to arrange about the fishing of the Lishreen River, which Lord Edmund wants to rent.”

“Well,” said Mr. Cohen, “if you say so no doubt you mean me to believe so.”

“Exactly,” said Basil. “I mean you to believe what I say because it is the truth.”

Mr. Cohen shrugged his shoulders.

“It is a pity,” he said. “It would have saved trouble if you and I and my friend Mr. Kaitcer and the excellent Royce could have worked together. Lord Edmund no doubt would have bought from us, and the price would have been most moderate. But since you will not be frank with me——”

He shrugged his shoulders again.

“I’m inclined to think,” said Basil, “that you must be mad. You seem to me to be talking the most utter nonsense I ever heard. Anyhow, I’ve said I’m sorry about that idiotic letter Royce sent you, and I can’t say any more. I don’t think I’ve any other business with you, so I’d be glad if you’d clear out

and leave me alone. I'm going to ring for my breakfast to be brought up to me."

"I am sorry," said Cohen, "very sorry. This means more trouble for us and for you. But there is at least one thing I may thank you for. You have made it quite clear to me that Lord Edmund Troyte is interested. That is, as you would say, good enough. We were not sure before, not quite sure. Now we know. Lord Edmund's reputation for knowledge in these matters stands very high. He would not try to buy or steal what you call a dud. That is so, is it not?"

"Clear out," said Basil sharply.

Cohen bowing again, and still smiling, left the room.

CHAPTER X

BASIL, who was both hungry and impatient, rang the bell. He waited for ten minutes, and then rang it again violently. Five minutes later Mick came in with a tray. He had done his best in the way of breakfast. He brought the remains of the salmon as well as a dish of bacon and fried eggs. He was apparently ready to do his best to provide entertainment for Basil while he ate.

"The police-sergeant was round here a minute ago," he said. "Sergeant Cussen is his name, and he's not been long here—only since the beginning of the month, when they shot the last one. I wouldn't wonder but your honour might have heard about that."

Basil, like most other people who read the newspapers, had heard of the shooting of a good many policemen, but he could not recall the case of Sergeant Cussen's predecessor.

"But that's neither here nor there, anyway," said Mick kindly. "What I was telling your honour was that Sergeant Cussen was after being round here asking more questions than anybody would care to be answering, which is the reason why I'm late with your honour's breakfast, for it was me he was asking the questions of. I hope, now, sir, that you have

everything you want, for if there's anything else you'd fancy, you've nothing to do only to mention it. What would you say now to a chop? I'd have one fried before you've finished the salmon if you fancied it."

Basil had no fancy whatever for a chop; but he was curious about Sergeant Cussen's visit and his questions. Not being an Irishman he was inclined to regard the police as the natural allies of law-abiding men, and the enemies of those who do wrong. His own conscience was clear, and he had every reason to suppose that Cohen and his friend were up to mischief of some kind. He welcomed the idea that the police were on the alert.

"What was the sergeant asking questions about?" he said.

"Just about what I was telling your honour a while ago," said Mick.

Basil thought back. Mick had told him nothing, so far as he could recollect, but he had hinted that Cohen's character was open to suspicion.

"But there's no need to tell a gentleman like your honour," said Mick, "that the sergeant got nothing out of me. Nor he wouldn't if he was talking to me all day and I knew twice as much about them boyoes as I do, which of course, I don't."

Mick might, apparently he did, strongly disapprove of Cohen and his doings; but he disapproved of the police more strongly still. Nor was he willing to speak any more plainly to Basil. He picked up the boots which he had left behind him when he took away the clothes. He also picked up the

girl's shoe which lay on the dressing-table. Then he opened the door.

"What are you doing with that shoe?" said Basil.

"I'm doing nothing with it," said Mick, "only taking it off to clean it along with the two boots. The dear knows they need it, the three of them."

There was no doubt about that. The girl's shoe was, if possible, muddier than Basil's boots. Basil did not like parting with the shoe, but it would certainly be better to give it back clean than dirty. He intended to give it back as soon as he possibly could.

"Very well," he said, "take it and clean it, but be sure you bring it back."

"I will bring it back, of course," said Mick. "Is it likely now that I'd leave your honour short of a shoe?"

Mick was a man of tact and discretion. He expressed no curiosity whatever about the shoe, treating it as if its presence in the room was a natural and ordinary thing. He appeared to take it for granted that Basil had three feet, like the Isle of Man, and wore a lady's shoe on the third.

While he was still standing in the door with the boots in his hand there was a noise of footsteps in the passage and Royce, still wearing a suit of pink flannel pyjamas, came into the room. He carried a large kit-bag in his hand.

"Oh, that's where you are, Mick," he said. "I was shouting for you all over the place. Why the devil weren't you somewhere about to give me a hand with this bag?"

"I was attending on the gentleman here," said Mick, "giving him his breakfast and the like."

"Well, as you are here," said Royce, "you may as well be useful. Unpack that bag. Leave one suit of clothes here for Mr. Price, take the other to my room, and fetch up some hot water. I ran home in the car," he went on to Basil, "and fetched some dry clothes. I dare say mine won't be a very good fit for you, a bit baggy round the waist, perhaps; but you'll be able to get into them, and it's better than if it was the other way about, and you were the one who had been growing comfortable. If that had been the way of it you couldn't have buttoned the waistcoat. That's another of the advantages of being married. You begin to fill out almost at once. You'll find that out some day, I hope. Had any inquiries from Mary Coppinger about her shoe?"

Basil frowned and nodded towards Mick, who was stooping over the kit-bag.

"Oh, you needn't mind Mick," said Royce cheerfully. "He knows all about everything. I expect he could tell us exactly how many pairs of shoes Miss Coppinger has. Couldn't you, Mick?"

"Sorra the pair of shoes that one owns only one," said Mick, "and, seemingly, she hasn't that much itself now, since the young gentleman took half of the pair off of her."

He looked up from his unpacking with an engaging smile.

"But, sure, what odds?" he went on. "It's seldom ever she troubles her feet with the like of shoes, or boots, either."

Basil, whose experience as a private secretary had filled him with conventional ideas, and who had besides fallen in love with Mary Coppinger, was not pleased at the way Mick spoke of her. Royce seemed to find nothing odd about it.

"Was she round asking for her shoe this morning?" he asked.

"She was not," said Mick, "but as I was just telling the gentleman now, the sergeant was, and it wasn't shoes he was asking for."

"That's a nuisance," said Royce. "We don't want the police mixing themselves up in this business at all. Who was the sergeant out after, us or the other fellows?"

"Is it likely now," said Mick, "that he'd be interfering with you?"

"It's quite likely," said Royce. "My experience of the police is that they're always interfering with the wrong people. However, I'm glad it wasn't us. What did you tell him about Cohen and his friend?"

"I told him nothing at all," said Mick.

He had finished his unpacking, and a pile of clothes lay beside him on the floor.

"Would it be the blue suit or the yellow one that I'll be taking to your room, Mr. Royce?" he said.

"The yellow one, of course," said Royce. "Can't you see that the blue suit is nearly new? Mr. Price must have it. He'll be wanting to look his best when he's handing that shoe back to Miss Coppinger. That's another advantage of being married, Price. You can wear the same clothes for years and not care how shabby they are, whereas before you're married you can't help thinking that every woman

you meet is looking to see whether there's a proper crease down the front of your trousers. It's an enormous comfort to be done with that kind of anxiety. I strongly advise you to get married as soon as you can. But, of course, you'll have to apologize to Miss Coppinger for stealing her shoe before you propose to her."

"Look here," said Basil angrily, "I don't care for that kind of chaff. I dare say you don't mean any kind of harm, but it doesn't seem to me decent to talk that way about any girl."

"Oh, all right," said Royce, "only—well, you know, I expect a girl would rather be talked about a little when she wasn't there than have the shoes dragged off her feet in the middle of the night by a man she'd never been properly introduced to. Just you ask her, and you'll find she agrees with me. You don't really understand girls, Price. You can't until you've married one. Now don't stand grinning there, Mick. You've got plenty to do besides discussing Miss Coppinger. For one thing, you've got to clean her shoe, and if she isn't able to see her face in the shine you put on it you'll be sorry for yourself afterwards. Tell me this now before you go. Supposing that police sergeant hadn't been the police sergeant—supposing, just for the sake of argument, that he'd been me, and supposing that he'd asked you—that is to say that I asked you—though mind you I'm not asking you. I'm only putting what's called a hypothetical case—you understand me, I suppose?"

"I do," said Mick.

"Well," said Royce, "in that case what would

you have said that Cohen and his friend were doing last night? I suppose you know."

"I do know," said Mick. "I know because I was told by one that saw them, and that's Jimmy Rafferty's niece, who was down here this morning early with half a dozen eggs that she thought might be wanting for your honour's breakfast."

"Jimmy Rafferty's niece," said Royce, thoughtfully.

"Herself and no other one."

"So it was up in Jimmy Rafferty's house they were last night?"

"It was. And there was a couple more of the same lads in it along with Jimmy himself."

Mick, laden with the yellow suit of clothes, Basil's boots, Miss Coppinger's shoe, a shirt, a collar, a tie, socks, and other garments, left the room.

"Jimmy Rafferty," said Royce.

Then he whistled.

"Well," he said at last, "that's all the more reason for keeping the police out of it."

Basil ceased to be angry about the way Miss Coppinger had been spoken about. Something in Royce's whistle and in the way he said Jimmy Rafferty's name made him uneasy.

"Who is Jimmy Rafferty?" he asked.

CHAPTER XI

“GET up and dress yourself,” said Royce. “I’ll go and get into a suit of clothes instead of these pyjamas.”

“Before you go,” said Basil, “just tell me who Jimmy Rafferty is, and why you whistled in that way when you heard his name.”

“It will take the best part of a day to answer those questions,” said Royce; “but I quite intend to do it. Only I won’t begin till we’ve both got some clothes on.”

The explanation did not take quite so long as Royce said it would, because he did not have to begin quite at the beginning of it. Basil, having been private secretary to a statesman for several years, had some knowledge which served as a starting-point.

When they were both dressed Royce led Basil down to the river. They took the salmon rod with them, but they did not fish. As soon as they came to an open reach of the river where there were no trees, rocks, or thick grass in which any listener could possibly hide, Royce sat down.

“Now,” said Basil, who had been getting more and more impatient, “now, perhaps, you will tell me who this Jimmy Rafferty is.”

“Jimmy Rafferty,” said Royce, “is not a subject

which any sensible man discusses in a public place where he might be overheard. That's the reason we're here."

Basil looked round. A lark, inspired by the fine morning, was singing far overhead. It seemed to be the only living creature which could possibly listen to what Royce said. Salmon—even if there were any in that part of the river—have no ears, and need not be considered.

Royce lit his pipe.

"The present condition of Ireland," he said, "is causing the greatest possible anxiety to all well-disposed people who are interested in the future of the country."

He might have been quoting a leading article from the "Irish Times." Basil thought he was, and became impatient.

"I know all about the present condition of Ireland," he said.

"If you do," said Royce, "you don't want me to be telling you about Jimmy Rafferty. He's part of the present condition of Ireland, and a damned important part."

"What I mean," said Basil, "is that I know what they write in newspapers, the sort of stuff you were quoting just now. I know that the country is in the middle of a revolution of sorts, so you needn't tell me that."

"Good," said Royce. "If you know that much it'll save a lot of time. Have you ever gone swimming in the sea on a rough day?"

"Yes, I have—often. But do go on about Rafferty."

"I am going on. If you've gone swimming in any sort of a big sea you know that it isn't the large waves that bother you. They come rolling along very much as you expect them to come, and you go over them or through them easy enough. What knock you about, slap you in the face, blind your eyes, get into your mouth and jolly well drown you if you happen to be drowned, are a lot of little waves which come at you sideways when you don't expect them ; dirty little beasts of things which take advantage of the storm that's going on, pretending they're just as much a part of it as the big rollers, whereas they're really simply out on their own, trying to do as much mischief as they can, thinking that nobody will notice them on account of the general turmoil. Well, that's what Jimmy Rafferty and his friends are. Understand ? "

Basil did not quite understand, though he began to get a dim idea of Royce's meaning.

"At the present moment," said Royce, "all the unattached blackguards in Ireland have broken loose, and taken to robbing banks and post-offices, burning houses, and generally playing Old Puck with everything and everybody ; knowing jolly well that if he gets caught, which he hardly ever is, he's only got to say that it was his political principles drove him to it, and then he gets credit for being the most superior kind of Christian martyr, whereas in reality he's—well, he's Jimmy Rafferty, the sort of young ruffian that goes straight to jail in any ordinary times and stays there."

"I see," said Basil, "and you think——"

"I think that if he and his friends, and Cohen,

and that scented aristocrat from London spent last night plotting together, it's pretty certain that somebody's in for trouble, and I shouldn't wonder if that somebody was Sir Amos Coppinger."

"Good Lord," said Basil, "and Miss Coppinger?"

"Unless the fair Mary is pretty nippy at getting across country in bare feet," said Royce, "I think you'd better give her that shoe back before night. From what I know of Jimmy Rafferty and his friends I think it likely that she'll have to make a bolt for it in the early hours of to-morrow morning."

Basil sprang to his feet.

"I'll go and warn the police at once," he said.

"Sit down," said Royce. "There's lots and lots of time. Nothing will happen before dark anyway, and if you dash off in that impulsive fashion you'll simply make things worse than they are. As I said this morning when Jimmy Rafferty's name was first mentioned, the most important thing of all is to keep the police out of it."

"I don't see that," said Basil. "If Miss Coppinger is in danger——"

"You'll see it when you think of it," said Royce. "What is Cohen after? We don't know; but we do know that it's something in Lishreen House, and it's something pretty valuable. If it wasn't, Cohen and his friend wouldn't be bribing Jimmy Rafferty and Co. to help them. They must be offering a bribe and a pretty big one or those blackguards wouldn't go into the game at all. They're not doing it for the sake of Cohen's beautiful eyes."

"Exactly," said Basil, "and that's why I say that the police——"

"Wait a minute. Cohen isn't the only one who knows about that valuable, whatever it is, and he isn't the only one who wants to get it safely out of the house before the creditors sell up the whole place. Sir Amos knows. Mary Coppinger knows. Judging by what you told me last night about the packing-case, old Mahony knows. Now if you go dragging the police into the business you may put a stopper on Cohen's little game, but you will also knock the whole bottom out of Sir Amos's plan. The police will keep a pretty close watch on the house, and it won't be possible to take anything very much out of it. The only people who'll benefit by that will be the creditors. I'm acting in their interests, of course, though I don't in the least want to. They're a set of measly swine, who thoroughly deserve to be swindled. But you're supposed to be helping Mary Coppinger. At least, that's what you told me you wanted to do."

"So I do," said Basil.

"Well, then, don't go appealing to the police."

"What do you think we'd better do?"

"Don't say 'we,'" said Royce. "I'm not going to assist in perpetrating a fraud, especially when the injured parties are my own clients. Whatever is done, you'll have to do yourself without my help."

"Well," said Basil. "What do you think I'd better do?"

"If I wasn't a lawyer," said Royce, "and if I wasn't in the delicate situation I am, and if I were asked for advice——"

"You are asked."

"And if I gave my advice (which I mightn't be

inclined to do), I think I should say this: Trot up to Lishreen House after lunch, taking the shoe with you, find Mary Coppinger, if she's anywhere about _____,"

"Begging your pardon for interrupting your honour."

Royce and Basil started and looked round. Standing behind them was old Mahony. He had approached them unseen and unheard. How long he had been standing behind them they did not know.

Royce, though surprised, was not in the least flurried.

"Now what on earth do you want here, Mahony?" he said. "You ought to have better manners than to come stealing up behind me in that way when I'm having a private conversation with a friend."

"It's just so as you'd have no complaint to make about my manners that I came here," said Mahony. "I'm sorry, so I am, Mr. Royce, if I hurt you last night. I've been thinking ever since that maybe I hit too hard; but that's what any man might do when one came on him sudden in the dark. Mick, up at the hotel, was telling me that your eye looked bad enough, and, faith, I can see that now for myself."

Royce's eye was swollen and discoloured, but he did not appreciate expressions of sympathy from anyone about it. If a professional man—a doctor, a lawyer, or a clergyman—comes by a black eye through any unfortunate chance, he is grateful to the people who take no notice of it and slightly irritated with the tactless friends who say that it looks painful. Royce, ignoring his own eye and Mahony's apology, turned to the old man.

"Oh," he said to Mahony, "you can talk English to-day, can you? Last time I saw you in the Petty Sessions Court at Carnew over some whisky distilling business you led us to believe that you couldn't speak anything except Irish, and we had to waste our time listening to a half-witted interpreter, a fellow who didn't know either language properly."

"To anyone that is a friend of Miss Mary's," said Mahony gravely, "and to anyone that isn't against the old master, I'm willing to speak whatever language might suit, and if it was Latin itself they wanted, sure I'd learn it rather than be making trouble."

"Well," said Royce, "you're right so far. This gentleman is a friend of Miss Mary's."

"I know that," said Mahony. "Didn't she cook a fish for him yesterday, and didn't he take the shoe off her foot last night? Would he do the like of that if he wasn't terrible fond of her? I'm an old man, Mr. Royce, but I was young once, though you mightn't think it to look at me now, and I know the strong hold that love takes on the heart of a man and the way it does be driving him to be doing strange things. I'd say that if a man would take the shoe off the foot of a girl it's a sign you might trust him to stand by her even if there was lions and tigers in front of her, or if the police and the soldiers was out after her."

At the moment he did it Basil had certainly not thought that his rape of the shoe would be regarded as an evidence of devotion. He had not meant it in that way at the time. But he did not contradict old Mahony. He was glad to have proved himself

Miss Coppinger's friend, though the proof seemed to him unusual and even unconvincing.

"Quite so," said Royce. "I'm glad you realize that you can count on Mr. Price. I don't intend to meddle with this business myself one way or the other. In fact, I'm going home directly after I've had some luncheon for fear of being involved in it against my will. But if there's anything, short of murdering Cohen, which Mr. Price can do, you've only got to tell him what it is, and he'll do it. Have you any message for him from Miss Coppinger?"

"I have," said Mahony.

Basil's heart throbbed. A message from Mary Coppinger, an appeal for help, no doubt, was more than he had dared to hope. We are not told what Perseus's feelings were when he heard Andromeda's shrieks, but he cannot possibly have been more eager to dash to her aid than Basil was to help Mary Coppinger. Dragons of the fiercest kind would not have frightened him. A combination of knavish furniture dealers and Connaught corner-boys did not daunt him in the least.

"She bid me say," said Mahony, "that if the young gentleman would give her back her shoe before Sunday she'd be thankful to him, for she'd feel backward about going to church with only one on her."

This was not quite the sort of message Basil hoped to receive. Still, it was something, and he was willing to make the best of it.

"Of course I'll give her back the shoe," he said; "I'll take it up there this afternoon."

"Is that all?" said Royce.

"That's all Miss Mary said," said Mahony, "but

there's a word I'd be glad to be speaking myself if so be it wouldn't offend your honour."

"It'll not offend me in the least," said Royce, "and I don't suppose it'll hurt Mr. Price's feelings if it comes from Miss Coppinger."

"It's this, then," said Mahony. "It would be as well if neither of the two of you were to come up to Lishreen House to-night. There's a little matter that Miss Mary and me and the old master wants to settle, and it's mighty inconvenient to us to be interfered with, whether by the way of having the shoes took off her feet or any other way. I'm not denying that the young gentleman meant well by what he did last night, and I know well that a man may do what's troublesome unbeknown to himself, when love has driven all the sense and wisdom out of him; but—— I don't blame your honour, only I'll say this: Miss Mary and I would have had the business settled and done with last night only for you and the way you interfered with us."

It is hard on a knight errant to be told to sheathe his sword and stand aside when he knows that giants, ogres, and other recreants are approaching his lady-love through the green shadows of the forest.

"But I'd like," said Basil, "to help you and Miss Coppinger if I may."

"I suppose you know," said Royce, "that Cohen and his friend and Jimmy Rafferty and his band of ruffians are out after you and Miss Mary, and mean to spoil your game if they can."

"Sure I know that well," said Mahony.

"And the police are out after them," said Royce.

"I was expecting as much," said Mahony sadly.

"Then don't you think," said Royce, "that you'd be the better of another man in your party. Here's Mr. Price, devoted to Miss Mary and offering to help her any way he can. You'd far better have him with you."

"If the young gentleman will give the shoe back," said Mahony, "it's all we'll ask of him."

He turned away as he spoke and walked slowly up the river towards the boat house.

"That," said Royce, "is a pretty decisive snub for you, Price. You're simply not wanted."

"Wanted or not," said Basil, "I'm not going to leave Miss Coppinger unprotected, at the mercy of Jimmy Rafferty, if he's the sort of man you describe."

"He's all that," said Royce, "and more. All the same if I were you I'd keep out of it. You don't understand girls, but I do. You may take my word for it that she'll be very angry if you go butting into her private affairs when you've been distinctly told you're not wanted."

"I can't and won't leave her to be murdered," said Basil. "Either I go to the police——"

"Don't do that," said Royce. "Don't do anything just yet. Come back and have a bite of lunch at the hotel. Things will look far rosier when we're properly fed."

They walked back together. At the door of the hotel, Mick, the porter, met them with a telegram in his hand.

"It came for Mr. Price," he said, "shortly after you went out. I'd have taken it after you if I'd known where to go to look for you."

Basil opened the envelope and read :

“Unexpected development of the Albanian Boundaries Dispute Commission sitting. Cannot find file of correspondence. Return at once if you have not already started.—TROYTE.”

Basil handed the message to Royce.

CHAPTER XII

“**T**HAT settles the matter,” said Royce. “You take my advice and go home. It’s far the best thing you could do, anyway, even if this telegram hadn’t come. Mixing yourself up in a fray like this is a mug’s game so far as you’re concerned. The Albanians are all brigands, but they’re simply Sunday School teachers compared to Jimmy Rafferty.”

Basil stood silent. Like many a better man before him, he was drawn one way by love and torn off in another direction by duty. Mary Coppinger was really a very beautiful girl. She had eyes which made an irresistible appeal. Her hair was like shining gold. Her face was exquisite. Considering all this, it was highly creditable to Basil that he hesitated as long as he did. Duty put up quite a good fight for the possession of him. But love won in the end. It generally does, and it is doubtful whether the poet who said he loved honour more really went off to the battle quite as quickly as he said.

“Jimmy Rafferty was up here after you going out,” said Mick, “and he was having a great talk with Mr. Cohen and the other gentleman.”

That piece of information put an end to Basil’s hesitation. Duty, as fickle a jade as fortune herself,

swung suddenly over to the side of love and pulled him the same way. It might be his duty, more or less, to return to London and find the papers about the Albanian Boundaries dispute. That was what he was paid to do. It was certainly a duty of a much more compelling kind to protect Miss Coppinger from pressing perils. He sat down on the bench outside the hotel door and scribbled a reply to Lord Edmund's message.

"Papers required are in filing case B, third drawer, near front. See Card Index Boundaries, sub-heading Albania. Hope return to-morrow."

Basil was a good secretary. He really did know where the papers were.

"If I were you," said Royce, who was looking over his shoulder, "I shouldn't send that wire. You'll simply involve yourself in a long and acrimonious telegraphic correspondence if you do."

"I don't see that," said Basil. "When he finds the papers he wants——"

"But he won't," said Royce. "He'll go and look in case B, drawer 197, or whatever it was you told him, but the papers won't be there."

"I put them there myself."

"Unless they're quite different from any papers I've ever known," said Royce, "they'll have moved off to somewhere else. Papers always do. Then Lord Edmund, when he can't find them, will begin to get irritated, and simply pelt you with telegrams."

"But I must send him word where the papers are, or where I think they are. What else can I do?"

"You can go back to him," said Royce. "That's what he tells you to do, and it seems to me he'll expect you to obey him."

"I'm not going to do that," said Basil. "At all events, not till I'm sure that Miss Coppinger is safe."

"Well, I expect Lord Edmund will sack you. I certainly should if I was in his position, but if your mind's quite made up—remember now you're acting contrary to my advice. But if you will go your own way and don't want to be sacked afterwards you'd better not answer that wire at all."

"But I must answer it," said Basil. "I must let him know where those papers are."

"No, you needn't. You couldn't answer it if it wasn't delivered to you, could you now?"

"Of course not; but it has been delivered. Hang it all, don't you see that I'm holding it in my hand this minute?"

Royce took the telegram out of Basil's hand, slipped it back into its envelope and stuck down the flap.

"Now, it hasn't been delivered," he said.

Then he turned to Mick, who was standing grinning beside him.

"Mick," he said, "take that back to the girl in the post-office and tell her there's no one of the name of Basil Price here and never has been and that you don't expect there ever will be. Tell her that there's not the slightest use her keeping the telegram, for she'll never find anyone to deliver it to. The telegraph girl in this office," he went on, turning to Basil, "is quite an intelligent girl and she has a strong sense of duty. When she gets that message from me she'll know that she ought to send the wire

back to London and then it'll be returned to Lord Edmund if he's had the sense to write his name and address on the back of the original form. The only other way in which he can possibly get at you is to wire to my office, and I'll take good care that those telegrams aren't attended to, so you'll be all right. In the end, when you do go back to him, you can put all the blame on the telegraph girl here or on Mick or on me if you like. We shan't any of us mind, and if Lord Edmund has the faintest idea of justice he won't blame you."

"Let him blame me if he likes," said Mick generously.

Without waiting for Basil to confirm the orders about the telegram he slipped it into his pocket and went off towards the post-office.

"But," said Basil feebly, "Lord Edmund knew I was coming here. He'll wonder what on earth has happened to me."

"Let him wonder," said Royce. "After a while he'll get tired of that. There's nothing that's such a nerve strain as prolonged wondering. Besides, I don't expect he'll really wonder at all. He'll jump to the conclusion that you've been killed before getting to Carnew. Lots of people are killed every day in this country, and the English generally think that that sort of thing happens even oftener than it does. I don't suppose Lord Edmund will even be much surprised. Then when you do turn up safe and sound in the end he'll be so pleased to see you that he won't ask any questions about what really happened."

Basil, who knew Lord Edmund pretty well, was

not at all sure that events would take the course that Royce suggested. Lord Edmund might, and probably would, begin to fuss horribly about the loss of his private secretary once he began to think that he was lost. The Irish Office in London, the Secretaries, Chief and Under, in Dublin Castle, military and police officers would be set to work to search Ireland from end to end for him or his corpse. He sighed. It would be most unpleasant when they actually found him. Then he reflected that all this would take days. The complex machinery of Imperial Government cannot be got to work in a minute. He also reflected that Lord Edmund's telegram was by that time back in the hands of the girl in the post-office, was probably actually being returned to London at the moment. It was quite too late for him to do anything.

He followed Royce into the hotel and sat down to luncheon. He was not able to eat very much. It was good evidence of his physical health that he was able to eat at all.

After luncheon he and Royce went round to the back yard of the hotel into the shed which Mick described as the garage. Royce's Ford car stood there.

"I'm sorry to have to leave you," said Royce, "but I really ought to be getting home. I'll be much safer there. There'll be a lot of trouble in this place to-night. Cohen and Co. will be trying to rob Sir Amos. Mary Coppinger and old Mahony will be trying to rob the creditors. The police will be trying to arrest Jimmy Rafferty. You'll be tumbling about among them like the joker in the

middle of a pack of cards when people are trying to play bridge with it. Nobody will want you in the least, and you'll have Mary Coppinger's shoe in your hand. It wouldn't suit me in the least to be mixed up in a business of that kind. I'm a professional man, and I've had quite a good reputation so far. Besides, I'm supposed to be acting for the creditors. Good-bye, and if I can be of any use to you without compromising myself you know where to find me."

He seized the starting-handle of the car and jerked it vigorously half a dozen times. The engine made no response. Royce dropped it and looked round at Basil.

"Of course, if you want me here very badly," he said, with a queer half-smile, "if you feel that you can't really get on without me——"

But Basil was slow-witted and wanting in sympathy.

"Oh no," he said. "I don't see that you could help me in any way."

Royce seemed a little disappointed, but he took hold of the starting-handle again and swung it vigorously round and round. Once more he failed to start the engine.

"I'm not at all sure," he said, "that it isn't my duty to stay here and see you through. After all, Lord Edmund more or less confided you to my care when he sent you here."

"Oh no, he didn't," said Basil.

"He may not have actually said so," said Royce, "but in actual point of fact he did. Knowing that I was here he felt sure that I'd keep you out of mischief as much as possible. I feel that I'd be rather going back on him if I left you now."

Basil began at last to see that Royce really wanted to stay, and was intrigued by the prospect of the confused adventures of the night.

"Of course," he said, "I'd like to have you with me. You know that, I'm sure."

Royce tried the car again, and got no more than a couple of gasps from the engine. Its obstinacy seemed to decide him.

"Well," he said, "if this old car won't start I can't go home. And anyway—they may strike me off the roll of solicitors afterwards for unprofessional conduct. They may prosecute me in Court for breach of trust for those creditors, but I'm hanged if I don't see this business through."

CHAPTER XIII

AT three o'clock Royce and Basil walked up to Lishreen House. Basil had the shoe, beautifully polished by Mick, wrapped up in a piece of newspaper.

"I don't think," said Royce, "that we'll go round to the front door. That would involve an interview with the old man, for we'd have to pass the smoking-room window, and he'd be almost sure to see us. I don't want to get tangled up with him if I can help it, for his temper is rather worse than doubtful, and he has a down on me because he thinks I oughtn't to be acting for his creditors. We'll go through the backyard to the kitchen and hand the shoe over to Lady Coppinger. She won't ask us for too many explanations about how we got it."

"I'd much rather give it to Miss Coppinger herself," said Basil.

"I dare say you would, and so you shall if she's there. But I don't expect she will be. She's pretty sure to be off somewhere with old Mahony. And anyway I want to have a chat with Lady Coppinger. She probably won't know much, but anything she does know I'll be able to get out of her, and I'd feel far more comfortable about my part in this affair if I understood exactly what it is that's going on."

Luck favoured Basil. Mary Coppinger and old Mahony were in the yard when he passed through it. They were standing together in a dilapidated outhouse, a shed which was evidently used for a fuel store. A large stack of turf filled one end of it.

"There she is for you," said Royce. "Go and give her the shoe. I'll slip into the kitchen and see what I can find out from the old lady."

Mary Coppinger and Mahony were staring rather hopelessly at the packing-case. They had brought it in during the morning from the place on the avenue where it had been left the night before. They did not seem much pleased with it now they had got it.

Basil took off his hat and stood bareheaded at the entrance of the shed.

"Miss Coppinger," he began most politely, "I really don't know how to apologize to you. My conduct last night——"

"Have you brought back my shoe?" said Mary.

"Here it is," said Basil, "but you must allow me to say—— If I'd had the slightest idea that it was you whom I met on the avenue last night—— But it was pitch dark. Of course that's no real excuse for me, and I don't suppose you'll ever forgive me for the attack I made on you——"

He stood there, holding the shoe in one hand and his hat in the other, and stammered out his apology.

"Give me the shoe," said Mary, "and let's say no more about it."

Basil handed over the shoe, but he felt that he must say something more, a great deal more. He began again.

"I'd no idea that you were likely to be out at that hour. If I'd known—— But, then, I didn't know until afterwards, and then——"

"If you go on apologizing," said Mary, "I suppose I shall have to apologize too. Please, sir, I see your chin is bruised, and I'm sorry I hit you."

She dropped a mocking little curtsy to him. Mahony, standing at the back of the shed, grinned and then laughed. Basil was quite aware that his chin was bruised. And his forehead had a lump on it which was painful. He felt more than a little foolish.

"I ought to make much longer apologies than yours," said Mary, "for I think I hurt you more than you hurt me. I got the best of it, didn't I, Mahony?"

"You did, Miss Mary," said Mahony. "And you'd have had him beat out and out only for the way he took the shoe off your foot. It was that gave him the advantage over you in the latter end."

"Oh, do let's stop apologizing and explaining and arguing," said Mary. "Come and look at the packing-case, Mr. Price. You made it, you know, and you're responsible for it, and it simply won't do."

Basil stared at the packing-case. It was a curious, ungainly-looking thing, curved in the most grotesque way. The soaking of the night before seemed to have warped the wood very badly. It had been bad enough before that, when Basil made it in the boat-house out of the curved planks. It was very much worse afterwards.

"Can you straighten it out?" said Mary.

Basil did not think he could, but he examined

it carefully. He even tried what he could do with a hammer and a screwdriver which old Mahony handed him. He worked hard for about half an hour. The packing-case was a mere wreck when he had finished. He stood up at last and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Do you mind telling me what it's for?" he said. "If I knew what you want to put into it I might be able to get you something else that would do. We'll never be able to make much out of this."

"I don't think I ought quite to tell you that," she said. "Not that I mind trusting you myself, but Dad mightn't be pleased."

She turned to Mahony and spoke to him in Irish. Mahony answered her with a long and, it seemed to Basil, an impassioned speech.

"If I tell you," said Mary to Basil, "will you swear not to say anything about it to Charlie Royce?"

"I give you my word of honour that I won't," said Basil.

"Very well," said Mary, "I'll trust you."

But she was not able to show her trust just then and there. Royce appeared at the kitchen door and came hurrying across the yard. He was evidently excited. A stranger, not knowing him, might have guessed that he was nervous. But nervousness was a condition which Charlie Royce had never in his life experienced.

"Whatever you're doing here," said Royce, "I'm not asking what it is, and I don't particularly want to know—but, whatever it is, you'd better clear out of this and do it somewhere else."

He spoke in a low tone as if he were anxious not

to be overheard, and thought that somebody might be near at hand to listen to him. The three workers in the shed gathered close to him.

"I happened to glance out of the kitchen window"—Royce was speaking in a whisper now—"and I saw Jimmy Rafferty sneak into the yard and get in behind the turf stack. He's been watching you and listening to every word you've said for the last five minutes."

The turf stack, which filled one end of the shed, formed an admirable hiding-place. A man behind it might perhaps have some little difficulty in seeing. He would certainly be able to hear every word spoken in the shed in an ordinary tone. Apparently it was also possible to hear what was said in whispers. Jimmy Rafferty realized that he was discovered. He made the best of a bad business, and stepped out. He did not seem in any way ashamed or abashed. He spoke in a tone which was plainly meant to be friendly.

"Good day to you, miss," he said. "Good day to you, gentlemen. How's yourself, Mahony?"

"What are you doing there, Rafferty?" said Mary. "Are you trying to steal the turf?"

Most people in Lishreen were afraid of Jimmy Rafferty. Mick, the hotel porter, had spoken his name with awe, daring to do little more than whisper it. Royce evidently regarded him as a dangerous man. Old Mahony drew back out of the shed altogether when Rafferty greeted him. Mary Coppinger alone of those who knew the man did not seem frightened. She made her insulting accusation without hesitating or showing a sign of nervousness.

"I was not stealing the turf," said Rafferty sulkily, "nor I wasn't stealing anything else either, and I don't know what call you have to be saying the like of me."

"It wouldn't be the first time you stole, if you were stealing," said Mary, "so there's no use your pretending to be indignant or virtuous, or anything of that sort. Who took my two white Leghorn pullets last October, just when they were beginning to lay, and sold them in Carnew for 7s 6d each? Was that you or was it not?"

Jimmy Rafferty scowled at her.

"If that's the way I'm going to be talked to," he said, "I'll stay here no longer."

"I'm sure nobody wants you in the least," said Mary, "and the sooner you're off out of this the better we'll all be pleased. So go along now."

"I'm going," said Rafferty. "I'm going right enough. But I'll just say this before I go. You'll be sorry, so you will—— You'll be sorry before all's over that you talked to me that way. Mind that now, my fine miss. And take care but that grand hair of yours might be cut off your head one of these nights."

This threat was merely bewildering to Basil. The others understood it very well. Ardent patriots at that time in Ireland used to teach young women to love their country with fervour by coming upon them at night, holding them down, and cutting off their hair, generally with blunt scissors, which made the business painful. After being clipped in this way it was supposed that the offending young women would abstain from smiling at policemen and from

other actions likely to hurt the feelings of patriotic men. The Jimmy Raffertys, who held most districts in terror, often cut off the hair of girls who were unwilling to smile on them, even though they had not been guilty of the grave crime of friendship with policemen or soldiers.

Jimmy Rafferty spoke to Mary Coppinger in a tone which was abominably insolent. As he turned to leave the shed the expression of his face was fiercely vindictive. Basil, who had been getting more and more angry since Rafferty first spoke, could control himself no longer. He stepped out of the shed into the yard and gave the man a very hearty kick. Rafferty had not had the advantage of an English public-school education, and such a thing had never happened to him before. He was immensely surprised and a good deal hurt. He stumbled forward, picked himself up, and turned, scowling, on Basil.

"What the hell do you mean by that?" he said.

Basil, by way of reply, knocked him down.

Rafferty was by no means a coward. He could hardly have been the leader of a band of young men given over to lawlessness if he had not possessed some courage. He was, indeed, brave enough when he had a loaded revolver in his hand and the other man was unarmed, or when he was dealing with girls and had several of his friends to help him. But this time he had unfortunately left his revolver at home, and was obliged to meet Basil on equal terms. He asked for no further explanations, but slouched out of the yard.

"Well," said Royce, "you've done it now with a vengeance."

"Somebody had to kick the brute," said Basil, "and as you didn't, I did."

"It's quite time Jimmy Rafferty was kicked by somebody," said Mary, "and I'm jolly glad you did it. I only wish you'd hit him harder when you knocked him down."

Basil, who for a moment had been slightly ashamed of his outburst of temper, was greatly pleased and elated at what Mary said. He felt ready to kick any number of Jimmy Raffertys if she would praise him for it.

"That's all very well," said Royce, "but we're in for it now in earnest. Jimmy Rafferty is as vindictive as any scoundrel unhung, and as things go in this country now he's dangerous. That kind of brute bites when he's riled. I wish to goodness you hadn't kicked him, Price. What on earth good do you do by behaving that way?"

"He deserved what he got," said Basil. "He deserved more, and I wish I'd given him more. And there's no particular harm done that I can see. He was in with Cohen in any case before I touched him. I don't see that we're much worse off now than we were before."

"He was in with Cohen sure enough," said Royce, "and he'd have done what he could to earn whatever money Cohen is paying him, but he wouldn't have gone out of his way to do any more. Now he'll do all he can to injure Miss Coppinger, and as for you, Price—— Well, you don't know what Ireland is now, but I do. And I can tell you this: there'd be very little said by anybody and nothing at all done if you were found to-morrow morning

in a bog-hole with your throat cut. What's more, Jimmy Rafferty is just the man to cut it for you."

Basil, like most inhabitants of civilized countries, found it very difficult to believe that anybody would cut his throat. People are murdered, of course, occasionally everywhere in the world. But no one who lives in a civilized and law-abiding country believes that he himself can possibly be in any real danger of assassination. Royce's tone made Basil a little uneasy; but he laughed, as a man might laugh at a gruesome and unpleasant joke.

Old Mahony slipped back into the shed after Jimmy Rafferty left the yard.

"I'm thinking, Miss Mary," he said, "that if we're to be doing what the old master wants done, we'd better be doing it at once. If we wait till Jimmy Rafferty goes home and comes back here with a few more like himself we might be hard set to get what's wanted done at all."

"But how can we do anything," said Mary, "when the packing-case is scattered about in fifty pieces?"

Mahony looked sadly at the litter of boards which strewed the floor of the shed. Something might perhaps have been done with the packing-case before Basil tried to straighten it. Afterwards it was plainly of no use at all except for firewood.

"I don't know," said Mahony, "but it might be best if we was to go in and talk to the old master. It's himself will know what ought to be done if anybody will."

CHAPTER XIV

“OLD master” is a phrase which is usually applied to a picture by an artist of long-established reputation. It was used by Mahony of Sir Amos. In his mouth it was a survival of the feudal spirit which lingers in the souls of Irish peasants who have lived in remote places and escaped the enlightenment of modern political doctrines. Perhaps no man ever deserved to be called master less than the battered, dissolute owner of Lishreen. But he was still the owner of the crumbling old house, and every one realized that in some sense he was their master and the proper person to consult.

Mary led the way into the house. As they passed through the kitchen Mahony made it plain that he did not mean to take any part in the council. He was ready to do what he was told and to serve Miss Mary and the old master faithfully, but until a plan was made he preferred the society of Lady Coppinger. He was not without hope that she would give him a cup of tea. Lady Coppinger herself neither expected nor wanted to join the party in the smoking-room. She was perfectly content to remain where she always lived, in the kitchen. When old Mahony sat down she took the kettle off the fire—her kettle was always

boiling—and made a strong pot of Cohen's excellent tea for herself and Mahony.

The rest of the party went into the smoking-room, where they found Sir Amos in his chair near the fire, his legs wrapped in a rug, his feet resting on a low stool.

"I'm afraid, Sir Amos," said Royce, "that we're in for trouble. Mr. Price—let's see, you haven't met Mr. Price yet. Allow me to introduce him to you. He's the private secretary of the Prime Minister."

"Not the Prime Minister," said Basil—"Lord Edmund Troyte, Secretary of State for Imperial Affairs."

Royce took no notice of the interruption. He probably thought his description of Lord Edmund's position sufficiently accurate for practical purposes.

"Last night," he went on, "Mr. Price picked up Miss Coppinger's shoe. He came up here to return it to her as soon as he found out whose it was."

Mary laughed. Royce looked round at her and winked.

"He wasn't, of course, trying to pick up Miss Coppinger's shoe at the time," he said. "He just happened to find it in his hand."

"I'm very much obliged to Mr. Price," said Sir Amos. "I'm afraid that my little girl is rather careless about her shoes and about other things."

In the presence of a stranger Sir Amos, who usually talked like a peasant, reverted easily to the manners and speech of a courteous gentleman.

"This afternoon," Royce went on, "he kicked and afterwards knocked down Jimmy Rafferty."

"I'm still more obliged to him," said Sir Amos. "If you feel inclined to kick Jimmy Rafferty again, Mr. Price, you may count on my sympathy and support, and I am sure that the Prime Minister, if he knew Jimmy Rafferty as well as I do, would highly approve of your action. Though now I come to think it over, I can't be really sure of that. Prime Ministers make friends with such odd people nowadays."

"But I have nothing to do with the Prime Minister," said Basil. "I'm Lord Edmund Troyte's secretary."

"Ah, yes," said Sir Amos, "so you said. I remember now. Well, I don't suppose that Lord Edmund would be in the least sorry to hear that Jimmy Rafferty had been kicked, if he knew the sort of man he is. Lord Edmund must be constantly meeting people who ought to be kicked. Jimmy Rafferty is only one of a large class."

"That's all very well," said Royce, "and I quite agree that the more Jimmy Rafferty is kicked the better for every one, including himself. If he was turned into a football for one Saturday afternoon it would do him all the good in the world. But—well, you know how vindictive these people are, Sir Amos, and when I tell you that he and Cohen and another bounder who's going about in a fur coat are all in league together——"

"The other bounder," said Sir Amos, "called on me yesterday afternoon. His name is Kaitcer, I think. I wonder if he—there is, or used to be, a Kaitcer in one of those streets off Leicester Square."

Basil suddenly recollected the name. Lord Edmund was a man who took a deep interest in art. Indeed,

it was often said of him that he neglected important affairs like Balkan boundaries in order to gratify his taste for pictures: Basil had more than once written letters to Messrs. Kaitcer and Son.

"Carlton Art Galleries," said Basil. "But surely it can't be the same man."

"Perhaps not," said Sir Amos.

Royce looked from one of them to the other while they spoke. He had never heard of the Carlton Art Galleries, and did not know the name of their proprietor. He wanted to get back to the pressing business of Jimmy Rafferty's vindictiveness.

"I don't know what Cohen is after," he said, "and I don't know anything about Kaitcer, if that's the other fellow's name. I don't even know what you're trying to do, Sir Amos. What's more, I don't want to know."

"I haven't the slightest objection to telling you," said Sir Amos, "but I dare say you're right in not wanting to know. As a lawyer——"

"Acting for your creditors," said Royce.

"Exactly," said Sir Amos. "It might be very awkward for you afterwards if it came out that you did know. Mr. Price," he went on, "I'm sorry that you should be involved in a rather troublesome affair, and if you will take my advice you will get out of it at once. Your best course is to go back to London, or wherever your particular statesman happens to be just now."

"But I should like to help you if I can," said Basil.

"That's exceedingly kind of you," said Sir Amos, "but I don't really think there's anything for you to do."

"I think I ought to complain to the police," said Basil, "that this man Rafferty has used threatening language to Miss Coppinger. I could tell them at the same time that Cohen——"

Sir Amos sighed a little wearily. Of all possible solutions of his difficulties an appeal to the police seemed to him the least desirable.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that help of that kind——"

"But Mr. Price really is helping us," said Mary "Yesterday he made a packing-case."

"Did you really make that packing-case?" said Sir Amos. "It struck me as quite the most remarkable and, if you don't mind my saying so, quite the most useless packing-case I have ever seen."

"I broke it up afterwards, sir," said Basil.

This seemed to him the completest apology he could make for his carpentry.

"You were quite right," said Sir Amos; "but now——"

"If you happen to want a packing-case," said Royce. "Mind, now, I'm not asking what you want it for, and I don't want to know; but if a packing-case will be of any use to you——"

"It's exactly what we want," said Mary—"six feet by four feet."

"Would it matter if it was a bit shallow?" said Royce.

"A packing-case of that size," said Sir Amos, "even if it's only eighteen inches deep, would be extremely useful to us. I refrain, out of regard to your professional reputation, Charlie, from saying what we want it for."

"I believe I can give you exactly what you want,"

said Royce. "My wife happens to be building a new greenhouse and she sent to Dublin for a quantity of glass. It came two days ago, packed in a large case, quite six feet long, and very strongly made. If you like I'll run into Carnew in my car and fetch it out. I'll hand it over to Mr. Price. I hardly like to go further than that. It wouldn't do for me to give it to you or Miss Coppinger, or even to old Mahony. You understand my position, Sir Amos. As a lawyer, acting for your creditors, I can't do more."

"It's very good of you to do so much," said Sir Amos.

Royce left the room. Basil followed him as far as the door. He intended to go to Carnew and help to bring back the packing-case. It seemed to him the most useful thing that he could do. But he glanced at Mary's face as he crossed the room and stopped abruptly. He thought, he certainly hoped, that he saw an appeal in her eyes, as if she wished him to stay where he was. He responded to it at once, and stood rather awkwardly just inside the door which Royce closed after him.

Sir Amos's chair stood right in front of the fire. so that he sat with his back to the door, and could not see who entered or left the room. He evidently thought that Basil had gone, for he took no further notice of him. His manners and way of talking lost their dignity and politeness.

"It's a damned nuisance," he said to Mary, "to have this fellow Rafferty butting in. Things were bad enough before, but we might have dodged Cohen and Kaitcer, or choked them. We could certainly have got to windward of Charlie Royce, who doesn't

really want to interfere with us. But Rafferty's a different business, especially now that he's riled. He has every corner boy in the country ready to follow him. It makes things infernally difficult. Where's Mahony?"

"He's drinking tea in the kitchen with mother," said Mary.

"What the devil does he want to drink tea for now? Go and fetch him."

Mary obeyed the order at once. Basil stood aside to let her pass. He felt as if he were an eavesdropper, listening to a conversation he had no right to hear. He had just made up his mind to slip away quietly when Sir Amos noticed his presence.

"Oh, you're still there, are you, Mr. Price?" he said. "You can smoke if you like, and if you choose to look round for a drink you'll probably find a bottle of whisky somewhere in the room. I can't get up to fetch it for you. I'm a cripple."

His tone was quite friendly. Basil lit a cigarette, but made no effort to find the whisky. A few minutes later Mary came back with old Mahony.

"Mahony," said Sir Amos, "I suppose you've heard about Jimmy Rafferty?"

"I've heard plenty about Jimmy Rafferty," said Mahony. "And what's more I seen plenty, more nor I wanted to. I don't know will we be able to do what your honour wants done if Jimmy Rafferty is set against the doing of it."

"Of course we can do it if we choose," said Mary. "I'm sick of the way you all talk of Jimmy Rafferty, as if—as if he was King, or a—— What do you call those people who are worse than kings? Not emperors.

Dictators. That's what you all seem to think Jimmy Rafferty is, an autocratic dictator. But I don't think so."

"Nor do I, Miss Coppinger," said Basil.

He had knocked Rafferty down without the slightest difficulty, and had but small respect for the man's fighting powers.

"And I'm not going to give in to him," said Mary, "whatever the rest of you may do."

Old Mahony frowned and shook his head gravely.

"It's all very well talking that way, Miss Mary," he said, "but nobody could tell what might happen to him if he went contrary to Jimmy Rafferty. There's many a one in Ireland has lost his life for less."

"Nothing particular happened to me," said Basil, "when I kicked him."

"No?" said Sir Amos, "but you may not find kicking him quite so easy when he has a revolver in his hand, and from what I know of him he's likely to be carrying it next time you meet him. All the same I am no more inclined than you are, Mary, to give in and do nothing."

"If anyone would know what is best to be done it would be your honour," said Mahony, "and whatever you may say I'm ready and willing to do it."

"Where's your boat, Mahony?" said Sir Amos.

"She's where you told me to have her, round in the pool under the old tower."

"Good," said Sir Amos. "It seems to me that our best chance is to get started at once. Cohen won't be expecting us to do anything before night. He'll think we daren't go dragging a great packing-case

about in broad daylight for fear of Charlie Royce seeing us and stopping us."

"Charlie's all right," said Mary.

"I know that," said Sir Amos. "I'm relying on Charlie. And there's another thing that will be a help to us. Neither Cohen nor Rafferty will think of our taking it off to that island of yours, Mahony. It's a damned unlikely place to take anything to. They may be keeping a look-out at the cross-roads this minute for a cart with a packing-case on it. They're sure to have the avenue gate watched all night, but I don't believe they'll ever think of our taking it off to Inishraher. Can you sail a boat, Mr. Price?"

"Yes," said Basil, "I've done a lot of yachting, racing, and so on."

"Going off to Inishraher in Mahony's boat in this weather isn't exactly yachting," said Sir Amos. "Still, if you really can sail a boat you might be useful. An extra hand is always useful."

"Thank you, sir," said Basil.

He was greatly pleased. A sail out to Inishraher, old Mahony's island, would be an adventure. In the company of Mary Coppinger it would be a delightful adventure. He foresaw all sorts of glorious possibilities, landings in strange rocky bays, strenuous haulings of a large and heavy packing-case across sandy beaches, picnic meals snatched at odd hours, and surrounding them all the time an atmosphere of romance, mystery and danger.

"The minute Charlie Royce comes back with the packing-case," said Sir Amos, "you must all get to work and then start as soon as you possibly can."

Our best chance is to get off at once. I wish to God I could go with you."

He twitched the rug which lay over his knees, and shifted one of his feet. Then he groaned. The foot made it quite plain to him that he could not go sailing in an open boat on a rough sea.

"I'll give Charlie an hour," he said. "He ought to be here sooner if he hurries."

Royce arrived much sooner than Sir Amos expected him. He walked back into the room less than half an hour after he had left it.

"Well," he said, "I always knew Cohen was no fool, but it turns out that he's d—d 'cuter than I expected. And he's taken no risks."

CHAPTER XV

“**W**HAT’S up now?” said Sir Amos.
Royce looked round the room with a smile.

“Of course,” he said, “all this is no affair of mine, and I haven’t the remotest idea what’s going on. I’ve simply come back to tell you what’s happened to me because I think it may interest you to know. As I walked down the avenue I came on Cohen. He was sitting under one of your alder trees, Sir Amos, wrapped up in a big coat and looking very sorry for himself. He got up when he saw me and was as polite as you please. But there were two ugly-looking lads behind him with revolvers. They didn’t attempt to stop me, but they didn’t offer to walk down to the village with me either.”

Royce nodded significantly.

“Watching the house, I suppose,” said Sir Amos.

“That idea occurred to me,” said Royce, “though I haven’t the dimmest notion what they can want to watch the house for. However, I turned back. I pretended I was just out for a walk and had gone far enough. I whistled ‘The Wearing of the Green’ just to show Cohen’s two friends that I bore them no ill-will on account of their political principles. If I’d known the tune of one of the songs of Zion I’d

have whistled it to please Cohen. When I turned the corner out of their sight, I struck down toward the old tower at the end of the point to see if there was anyone lurking about in that direction. It's a surprising thing, but I came on a picnic party not a hundred yards from the house, with Jimmy Rafferty at the head of it. He grinned at me in a devilish offensive way, and took care to let me see that the instruments of their merry-making were revolvers. I told Rafferty that I was surveying the place with a view to laying out a private golf links for Lord Edmund Troyte."

"My goodness," said Basil, "but he doesn't play golf. He hates the game."

"Jimmy Rafferty probably doesn't know that," said Royce, "and I had to tell him something to account for the way I was meandering about. Not that he believed me. He didn't. I hardly expected he would. But I felt I owed him an explanation, for I turned away from him up the hill, and went along past the old garden. There I came on Kaitcer, fur coat and all, and another of Jimmy Rafferty's boys along with him. Revolvers as usual, and I quite thought that fellow meant to pot me. He was an ignorant savage, and didn't realize that there was no earthly point in shooting me. I told him I was looking out for a suitable place to bury a pet dog of Miss Coppinger's which had died suddenly during the night. I had to tell him something or else I really think he would have shot me. You'll see what an unsophisticated bandit that was when I tell you that he actually believed me and asked me what kind of a dog it was. I told him it was——"

"The long and short of it is," said Sir Amos, "that we're surrounded and can't get out."

"I don't quite say that," said Royce. "In fact any of the parties would have let me pass, except perhaps the last fellow who'd have expected me to go back for the corpse of the Bavarian wolf-hound. That's what I said your dog was, Miss Mary. But I wouldn't care to try and get away with any luggage, particularly with anything like a packing-case. I don't in the least know why—and I don't in the least want to ask—but I think they'd have stopped me if I'd been carrying a packing-case. That's the reason I came back here instead of going to Carnew as I promised. They might have let me bring a packing-case in. They certainly wouldn't have allowed me or anyone else to take it out again."

When Royce had delivered his news he strolled over to the window, lit a cigarette, and stood there looking out. He left it to be understood that he neither knew nor cared what the watching of the house meant or how it affected Sir Amos. The rest of the party sat silent for a minute or two. It was Basil who spoke first.

"Surely," he said, "you'll allow me to go for the police now. It's plainly their business to put a stop to this kind of organized tyranny."

"Oh, don't talk damned nonsense," said Sir Amos.

He appeared to be too much irritated by the news he had heard to be able to speak civilly to Basil or anyone else.

"I'll say this," said old Mahony firmly. "I'll say this, if I never say another word. Let the police

start interfering on the one side or the other, and I'm done with the whole business. I'm an old man that has got through life up to now without mixing himself up with the police, and, please God, I'll keep that way to the end."

"The police," said Mary, looking appealingly at Basil, "would only make things worse."

"I don't know what the devil we're to do," said Sir Amos. "If they've picketed us as close as Charlie Royce says we haven't the faintest chance of getting a packing-case out of the place either by day or night."

"We have not," said Mahony.

"Could we," said Basil, "pretend that it was the body of the pet dog in the packing-case, and bury it."

It was a wild suggestion, and nobody took any notice of it.

"A Bavarian wolf hound," he said hopefully, "sounds quite a large kind of dog. We might pretend that the packing-case was the coffin, and bury it in a hole somewhere. We could dig it up afterwards, you know, when they're gone. They can't stay here watching the house for ever."

"But we haven't got a packing-case," said Mary. "Charlie Royce didn't bring one."

That, by itself, was a sufficiently weighty objection to Basil's plan. But Sir Amos added another.

"Do you think I'm such a damned fool," he said, "as to bury my great-grandmother in a damp hole and leave her there for weeks?"

Basil looked at him in wild surprise. Sir Amos's great-grandmother must, he supposed, have been dead for nearly a century. There could be no possible

objection to burying her if by some curious chance she had not been buried already.

"Your great-grandmother," he gasped.

"Oh, don't be a perfect fool," said Sir Amos. "I'm talking of the portrait of my great-grandmother, that one there."

He pointed to a large dirty picture which hung above the chimney-piece in a cracked and tarnished frame.

"It was painted by Gainsborough," he added.

He spoke in a loud, angry tone which must have been audible in the kitchen. Royce, who was standing in the window, turned round.

"I wish," he said, "that you wouldn't shout quite so loud. I'm a bit deaf, and when I'm meditating on the beauties of the landscape, I'm quite inattentive to everything that's going on round about me. But if you insist on shouting things——"

"I'm sorry, Charlie," said Sir Amos. "I keep forgetting that you're a lawyer."

"And acting for your creditors," said Royce. "But luckily I didn't hear a word you said, though I very nearly did. I don't know what you're talking about; but I don't mind telling you what I'd do myself in a purely hypothetical case. Supposing I had a picture and I wanted to get it away to some safe place, and supposing I was surrounded with people who wanted to steal it from me but couldn't get it as long as it was in the house. And supposing that what I wanted to take away was a very large picture—mind, now, I'm only putting a purely imaginary case. But if I was in that position I should be inclined to cut the canvas out of the frame and roll

it up. You can't walk through armed pickets with a packing-case which it takes two men to carry. But one man, after dark, might slip through with a roll of canvas done up in an oilskin cover."

"It's an awful pity you're acting for the creditors," said Sir Amos.

"I'm sorry about that myself," said Royce. "They're a measly lot. I'd much rather be acting for you. But you see how I'm fixed, and I can't help myself."

"I'm not acting for anybody's creditors," said Basil, "and if you'll allow me——"

"I'm going back to the hotel to look out for a bit of dinner," said Royce. "You'd far better come along with me, Price."

"Very well," said Sir Amos, "but come up again this evening, Mr. Price. Don't listen to me now, Charlie. Come up about midnight, Mr. Price. Mahony will be down at the point with the sails on his boat. You and Mary might manage—if one of you scouted out in front and the other——"

"We'll do it yet," said old Mahony triumphantly.

"We'll do it all right," said Sir Amos, "but we've got to take every possible precaution. Mahony, do you go down to the village at once. They'll let him through the pickets, won't they, Charlie?"

"I expect they will," said Royce, "if he's not carrying anything with him."

"Go stark naked if they insist on it," said Sir Amos, "and when you get there borrow a saw from somebody and a hammer from somebody else, and——"

"Sure I have a saw and a hammer," said Mahony. "They're out in the shed this minute along with

what's left of the packing-case the young gentleman made."

"Borrow others," said Sir Amos. "Borrow every tool you can think of, and buy a good big bag of nails. Charlie, will you lend me half a crown to pay for the nails? I've never asked you to lend me a penny before, and I've good security to offer you."

He nodded towards the picture with a smile.

"I'll lend you five bob with pleasure," said Royce, "but for goodness' sake don't name the security."

"As you come back," said Sir Amos to Mahony, "let Rafferty and Cohen and all the rest of them see what you've got with you. Then go into the shed and make as much noise as you can, hammering at the packing-case. If anyone comes and looks at you tell him you're trying to nail it together."

"That's not a bad idea," said Royce.

"It ought to lead them to suppose that we're going to use the packing-case," said Sir Amos, "and if they're on the look-out for it they won't be so particular about searching anyone who goes along towards the old tower at night with an oilskin package under his coat."

"Come along, Price," said Royce. "You're no particular use now, and unless we get back to the hotel and tell them we want some dinner there won't be any for us when the time comes to eat it."

"But," said Price, "will you be safe here, Sir Amos? Will Miss Coppinger be safe? I don't like leaving you here when the house is surrounded by men like Rafferty."

By way of reply Sir Amos opened the drawer of the table beside him and took out a heavy revolver.

He laid it down, pushed his hand further into the drawer, and took out another.

“The police are supposed to have taken all our arms from us,” he said, “but I didn’t feel inclined to part with mine. Mary, my dear, run up to my room and fetch down my gun. It’s in its case under the bed, and a box of cartridges beside it. A double-barrelled shot-gun,” he added thoughtfully, “is a nasty weapon to face at close quarters. I’m a cripple so far as my legs are concerned, Mr. Price, but I have the use of my hands all right. Jimmy Rafferty has known me ever since he was a small boy, and he’ll not be under any misapprehension about the sort of way I act. If anybody I don’t know or don’t like walks into this room I shan’t wait to be told to put my hands up or to ask any questions. I shan’t even ask the visitor to put his hands up. My God! I wish I could get about. I shouldn’t bother much about their pickets if I could get at them. But you needn’t worry about what’ll happen inside this house. If there’s any sort of attack made I shan’t be the one that has to be buried afterwards. Nor will Mary.”

CHAPTER XVI

SIR AMOS'S boasts, his weapons, and his air of cold-blooded determination impressed Basil. But he was by no means easy in his mind. He was haunted by the fear that Mary Coppinger might be attacked suddenly, perhaps when she was in the fuel shed with old Mahony. All the way down to the village and afterwards in the hotel he talked about his fears. Royce did his best to reassure him.

"After all," he said, "it's Cohen who is in command of that besieging party, and there's nothing in the world he hates more than committing murder. He's not bloodthirsty, and he's desperately nervous about being hanged. All he wants is to get a hold of the picture. He knows perfectly well that Sir Amos must send it out of the house some time, and he has nothing to do but wait and take it when it comes. If it isn't taken out of the house before the auction the creditors would get it. Cohen knows that Sir Amos would never let that happen."

"I don't so much mind about Cohen," said Basil. "But what about Rafferty? You said yourself that he was a murderous ruffian."

"And he is; but he's not an absolute fool. He can pretty well guess that old Sir Amos will be sitting there with a couple of revolvers and a shot gun. He

knows exactly the kind of man Sir Amos is. Oh, Jimmy Rafferty is fond enough of bullets when it's a case of his shooting them into other people, but he's not by any means so keen on them when somebody else has a chance of shooting them into him. You may be quite easy in your mind. There'll be no attempt to rush the house. After all, why should they try it when they're sure they can get what they want with practically no risk?"

This line of argument was no doubt sound, but it did not altogether reassure Basil. He wanted to go back to Lishreen House at once and lurk about in the grounds ready to rush to the rescue of Mary Copping. Royce suggested spending the rest of the afternoon on the river in the hope of catching another salmon. He even offered to carry the landing-net and the gaff while Basil fished with their only rod. But Basil refused to be comforted in any such way.

"If it's any consolation to you," said Royce, "Sergeant Cussen and two of his men were parading off towards Lishreen House as we entered the village. I saw them myself. They won't do any good, of course. If they do anything at all they'll do harm, embarrass Sir Amos, and get old Mahony's back up. But Cohen and his friend are sure to see them stalking round, and certainly won't attempt to attack the house or murder anyone while the police are actually looking on. They wouldn't in any case, as I've explained to you, but it may ease your mind to know that the police are there."

It did ease Basil's mind a little; but he remained too anxious to fish with any pleasure or to sit quiet and smoke. At last, urged by Royce, who was getting

tired of him, he went off for a walk by himself, promising to be back in time for dinner.

Royce secured the only comfortable chair in the hotel, made Mick build up a large fire in the dining-room, and settled down with his pipe and a newspaper. Having read and smoked for a while, he dropped off into a quiet doze.

At six o'clock he woke up with a start, to find Mr. Kaitcer standing over him.

"Hullo," said Royce, "tired of sitting about in the damp up at Lishreen House?"

"That," said Kaitcer, "is all damned foolishness."

"Then why do it?" said Royce.

"I am not doing it any more," said Kaitcer. "I have had quite enough of it already. I believe that I have caught a cold."

He snuffled, shook out a clean pocket handkerchief and blew his nose. Royce noticed that this handkerchief had not been scented, and inferred that Kaitcer was now so much in earnest as to have neglected the minor elegancies of life. After putting his handkerchief back in his pocket Kaitcer sneezed violently and was obliged to take it out again. There was no doubt that he really had caught a severe cold. He drew his chair up towards the fire, but was not able to get very near it because Royce sat in the exact middle of the hearthrug and did not seem inclined to move a single inch. Kaitcer in no way seemed to resent the rudeness of Royce's immovable position. He rubbed his hands together in a friendly and ingratiating way.

"You and I," he said, "are men of business."

Royce leaned far back in his chair and put his feet

upon the chimney-piece. If it is a compliment to be called a man of business—and Kaitcer evidently meant to be complimentary—Royce was most unresponsive.

"It is always a comfort," said Kaitcer, "to deal with a man of business. My friend Cohen, who can no doubt buy and sell, is not in the wider sense of the word a man——"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I should have thought that Cohen was a man of business," said Royce.

"He is too young. This morning when he made a proposition to your friend he conceived that he was insulted and that has made him what you call mad. Is not that the word?"

Kaitcer spoke good English with a slightly foreign accent, and only seemed a little uncertain of himself when he came to a word like "mad," used with a meaning not given in ordinary dictionaries.

"A man of business does not get mad," he said, "even when he is insulted. But your friend is young, too," he went on with a confidential smile, "whereas you and I——"

"I'm not exactly a Methuselah yet," said Royce.

"Ah, but you have sense," said Kaitcer, "the sense of a business man and a man of affairs. That is why I am now approaching you with a little proposition. You will listen to me. I will listen to you. You and I will not insult each other or get mad."

"Well," said Royce, "what is it?"

"I lay all my cards on the table," said Kaitcer. "I am frank, quite frank. I tell you that there is a picture in Lishreen House which I want to get. Cohen

found it there. He told me of it. He said he thought it was a good picture. I came and saw it. Thanks to Cohen's friendship with Lady Coppinger I was able to see it, yesterday, before Sir Amos came downstairs. I examined it, and I pledge my reputation that it is a genuine Gainsborough. You see how frank I am. I give you my opinion without hesitation, and my opinion is worth something."

"It may be," said Royce, "but I don't in the least know whether it is or not."

"My dear sir"—Mr. Kaitcer spoke in a tone of offended dignity—"I am Kaitcer, Emmanuel Kaitcer, of the Carlton Galleries, and you say that you do not know whether my opinion is worth anything."

"I never heard of you before," said Royce. "But that doesn't matter. Go on with your proposition."

"Never heard of me! But my name is known everywhere—in London, in Paris, in every capital in Europe. There is no one in the world of art who does not know me. And you—you, a barbarian living in an Irish bog. You say you never heard of me."

"I'm afraid you are getting mad," said Royce, "in spite of all you said about being a business man and keeping cool. Now I'm as calm as a sleeping cow on a summer afternoon; though, mind you, I don't actually like being called a barbarian, and my house isn't in a bog."

"But it is intolerable," said Kaitcer, "utterly absurd and intolerable that you say you do not know me."

"I don't see anything absurd about it," said Royce. "I dare say, for instance, you don't know me, though

I'm quite familiar in every Petty Sessions Court in Connaught."

"I do not suppose," said Kaitcer bitterly, "that you know an Old Master from a Christmas card, yet you are trying to obtain a picture which is—my God, it is a pearl before a swine."

"There you go again," said Royce. "You are calling me a swine now, which is extremely offensive, and still I'm keeping cool. How can you be sure that I know nothing about pictures?"

"You do not know my name," said Kaitcer. "You do not know my reputation. You do not know that I'm the greatest authority on art in the world. Therefore you cannot know pictures. Yet you are trying to get this one."

"As a matter of fact, I'm not trying to do anything of the sort. All I want is to keep well out of what seems to me an extremely shady business. Sir Amos is trying to rob his creditors. You're trying to rob Sir Amos. Now I happen to be an honest man, more or less, and I'm trying to avoid robbing anyone."

Mr. Kaitcer drew himself up with some dignity.

"You are trying to rob the world of a great picture," he said, "and you are trying to rob me, you and your friend."

"So far as my friend is concerned," said Royce, "you will see the absurdity of suggesting that he's trying to rob anyone when I tell you that his name is Basil Price, and that he's private secretary to Lord Edmund Troyte."

"Lord Edmund Troyte," said Kaitcer.

Then he sat down again, and drew his chair very close to Royce.

"Lord Edmund Troyte," he repeated in a low, thoughtful tone. "Cohen said something to me about him this morning, but I did not believe him. So this young man is secretary to Lord Edmund Troyte?"

"Exactly," said Royce. "Now you know who Lord Edmund is. An eminent statesman, quite the most eminent statesman of an all-round kind to be found in Europe to-day. I may be a barbarian, and a swine living in a pigsty in a bog; but I do know something about Lord Edmund Troyte."

"You know nothing about him, nothing at all that matters."

"Yes, I do. I know a lot about him. I know that he argues with people about the boundaries of Albania, and very few people can do that. I know that he has a house full of filing boxes and card indexes, and it wouldn't surprise me in the least to hear that he owned three or four typewriters. I also know—and this is a thing that hardly anybody else knows about him—that he's keen on salmon fishing. There now. Don't you ever say again that I know nothing about Lord Edmund Troyte."

"That," said Kaitcer, waving his hand airily, "that is all nothing. What are Albanians or Greeks? What are Poles and Armenians? What are Slavs or Magyars? What are they and what do they matter?"

"Very little, I dare say," said Royce. "Still they do make more or less fuss in the world, and Lord Edmund is the man who keeps them from cutting each others' throats."

"That," said Kaitcer, "is all nothing. It matters nothing. What does matter is——"

He paused. He had a dramatic instinct for making a good point effectively. Unfortunately, Royce cut the pause short.

"I quite agree with you," he said. "Salmon fishing is far more important."

Kaitcer gasped. Then he pulled himself together and said solemnly :

"Lord Edmund knows more about great art than any amateur in England, more perhaps than anyone at all, except me. And he is an authority—next to me he is the authority—on the English portrait painters of the eighteenth century."

"Ah," said Royce. "Now this man Gainsborough, who painted Sir Amos's great-grandmother, did he live in the eighteenth century?"

Kaitcer did not appear to hear this question. Perhaps he was occupied with his own thoughts. Perhaps he simply disdained to answer it.

"I see it now," he said. "Cohen was right, though I did not believe him. That is why Lord Edmund's secretary is here. He was sent over to buy, and if he could not buy, then to steal the portrait."

"You're entirely wrong there," said Royce. "Mr. Price never heard of the portrait till to-day, and I don't suppose Lord Edmund knows of its existence now."

This statement was quite unconvincing to Kaitcer ; but he took it in good part, and evidently he did not blame Royce for making it. He leaned forward and laid his hand on Royce's arm in a highly confidential and friendly manner.

"You and I," he said, "are business men."

"You said that before," said Royce, "and then

immediately afterwards you called me a barbarian. I hope you're not going to do that again."

"No, no. Forget all that. I apologize. I am sorry. Forget it. I have a proposition to make to you. I will sell the picture to Lord Edmund at a low price. He shall have it for—for—far cheaper than he could otherwise buy it. Tell your friend to go home—the young secretary. Let him go home. I shall secure the picture and Lord Edmund shall buy it from me."

"What about Sir Amos?"

"I will give him £50. Even if he will not sell and I have to take the picture from him, still I will give him the £50. And," here Kaitcer lowered his voice to a whisper, "there will be £50 for your young friend the secretary."

"That sounds satisfactory so far," said Royce. "But there are still the creditors. I'm afraid that this is a very complicated affair. Quite a lot of conflicting interests to be considered. There are the creditors, you know. What about them?"

"The creditors," said Kaitcer. "I know those moneylending creditors. They are sharks, harpies, leeches, suckers of blood. Believe me, I know them."

"I quite agree with you," said Royce. "But you see I'm acting for them, and whatever you think of them I must consider their interests."

"For you," said Kaitcer, "there will be £25. No. You are a professional man and a man of honour. For you there will be £50."

"Well," said Royce, "that sounds fair all round."

"It is more than fair, it is generous. Remember that I must also pay Cohen. It was Cohen who found the picture here and told me of it. And I must pay

the savages whom Cohen has hired. I must pay everybody."

Royce took his heels off the chimney-piece, kicked the fire, which had burned low, and then walked over to the window.

"I shall make nothing out of the transaction," said Kaitcer. "If I clear my expense that is all I can possibly do. But, for the love of art, to save a great picture from destruction, I am content even to lose a little."

"I see Price coming along the road," said Royce. "Suppose you lay your proposition before him."

He opened the window and shouted to Basil.

"Now, Price," he said. "Mr. Kaitcer is convinced that you've been sent over here by Lord Edmund to buy or steal a picture from Sir Amos, which is exactly what Mr. Kaitcer is trying to do himself."

Basil stared first at Royce and then at Kaitcer. Then he opened his mouth to speak.

"Don't attempt to deny it," said Royce. "It won't be the slightest use if you do, for Mr. Kaitcer won't believe a word you say."

"But——" said Basil. "Hang it all, Royce, you know what I came here for."

"Mr. Kaitcer is making you an offer," said Royce. "A very fair offer. He'll let Lord Edmund have the picture cheap. You said cheap, didn't you, Mr. Kaitcer?"

"Very, very cheap," said Kaitcer.

"And he'll give you £50 for yourself," said Royce, "as compensation for all you've been through. All you have to do in return is merely to clear out of this and not interfere with Mr. Kaitcer's plans for getting the picture."

Basil would certainly not have agreed to such a proposal, even if there had been no Mary Coppinger in the world. But he had been thinking of her and of very little else all day, and the suggestion that he should aid in a scheme for robbing her struck him as a grotesque kind of insult.

His difficulty in replying lay in the fact that he did not know where to begin. He felt that he ought to resent the attack on his own honour. He ought to defend Lord Edmund from the charge of planning to swindle Sir Amos or his creditors. He wanted, above all, to make it clear that he meant to be loyal to Mary Coppinger's interests. He flushed deeply and stood speechless with his mouth wide open.

"Perhaps," said Kaitcer, "you would prefer a percentage on what Lord Edmund pays me for the picture. Shall we say $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent on the price I receive?"

"If you go on in this generous way, Mr. Kaitcer," said Royce, "you'll be very heavily out of pocket over the transaction."

Basil said nothing at all. He walked quietly over to Kaitcer, took him by the back of the neck, pushed him out of the room and shut the door behind him.

"Well," said Royce, "you're doing things pretty thoroughly, I must say. You seem to have insulted Cohen before you got out of bed this morning. Then you kicked Jimmy Rafferty in such a way as to hurt him severely. Now you've handled Kaitcer, who's the greatest authority on art in Europe, as if he were a sack of potatoes. Never mind. I've ordered quite a decent dinner, so we'll have one more good meal before the tempest bursts on us."

CHAPTER XVII

ROYCE and Basil dined together, and dined very well. They began with salmon steaks, fried by the cook, who had been taught this part of her art by Royce. Mick, the porter, provided the salmon. He held views about fishing rights which were primitive—probably those of his remote ancestors, or else very modern—those of enlightened Socialists—but which were certainly **not** those of the law nor of the owners of rivers. And he caught fish when he wanted them by methods—primitive, too, no doubt, or perhaps socialistic—which conventional sportsmen despised and execrated. Basil groaned when Royce explained them to him; but he ate the salmon. The great advantage of Mick's way of fishing is that there always is a salmon to eat. Basil, with his rods, his flies, his landing-nets and gaffs, was not by any means so sure of results.

After the salmon they had a large piece of boiled bacon, sent up to table surrounded with cabbage, turnips and parsnips. Royce took full credit for the excellence of this dish. He often spent the night in "Lishreen Hotel" for the sake of the fishing, and had, so he told Basil, trained the cook himself. One important lesson he claimed to have taught her: never to attempt anything which she did not know

how to cook. It was better, he believed, to eat a simple thing like bacon, properly boiled, than to sit staring in disgust at an uneatable salmi or ragout. Unfortunately, the cook had not learned this useful lesson perfectly. After the boiled bacon she gave them an apple tart; and pastry was beyond her powers. The covering of that tart was soft, leathery and impossible to chew. Mick may have eaten it afterwards. Neither Royce nor Basil made much attempt at it.

Cohen and Kaitcer did not appear. Royce was of opinion that Kaitcer had gone to bed to nurse his cold, and that Cohen must be eating damp bread, very uncomfortably, under the alder trees in the avenue of Lishreen House. But Basil was by no means easy in his mind. He feared that there was some fresh activity among his enemies, and wanted to go up to see what was happening immediately after dinner. It was with the greatest difficulty that Royce kept him quiet.

At half-past ten it was impossible to restrain him any longer, and they started.

There was no moon at first and the night was very dark, just the sort of night on which it ought to be easy to creep along unseen. But they knew that Rafferty and his sentries would be on the alert, and they were particularly anxious to reach the house without being discovered.

"I don't suppose," said Royce, "that they'd stop us going in, though they might. But if they see us they'll know there's something on and there won't be a chance at getting away with the picture. Not that I mean to take a hand in that part of the pro-

ceedings. You and Mary and old Mahony must manage that without me. I'm a professional man and it wouldn't suit me——"

Even Royce, though singularly fond of talking, did not feel it necessary to explain his position again. Instead of going on to speak about his duty to his clients, he suggested a plan for getting into Lishreen House unseen.

"We'll keep clear of the road and the avenue," he said. "They'll be on the watch there, whether they're actually expecting us or not. We'll go right round by the beach, as close to the sea as we can. We'll leave the house on our left, struggle along the rocks to the old tower, and then double back. They'll know that you haven't enough knowledge of the locality to go that way by yourself, and they won't be expecting me at all. Cohen and Rafferty both know that I'm not the sort of man to be mixed up in a shady, unprofessional business like this. They'll probably think I've gone back to Carnew and that they've only you to deal with. Anyway, if they are watching we ought to be able to slip by them in the dark."

In spite of the darkness their way was easy enough at first. Waves, breaking on a stretch of beach, make a line of foam which shows dimly white even on the darkest night, and the sand under their feet was smooth and hard. Sometimes a wave, rushing further shoreward than its fellows, wet them to the ankles. Sometimes scraps of spume, torn from the sponges on the beach, were blown against their faces.

"The tide's rising," said Royce. "It'll be over the road again to-night. We shall have to wade, but all

the same, we'll keep off the road. It won't be much deeper on the shore."

They bent westward with the bend of the bay. Suddenly the line of white foam in front of them ceased and the noise of breaking waves was less clamorous. Before them lay a stretch of inky blackness in which nothing could be discerned. Royce stopped.

"Now for it," he said. "We've got 200 yards of wading to do. It's all right, of course, but all the same, I wish——"

He stopped speaking and stood silent for so long that Basil became slightly anxious.

"Is there any risk of our not being able to find our way?" he said. "It's rather dark."

"Oh, there's no difficulty about that," said Royce. "The tide's rising and the flow of water against our legs will give us our direction. We've only got to keep it on our right sides, and then we can't go round in circles and come back again to the place we started from."

"Any risk of our edging out to sea?" said Basil.

"Not unless we're perfect fools," said Royce. "We'd feel the water getting deeper if we did that. All the same, I wish——"

"What are you nervous about?"

"If you will have it," said Royce, "I wish you weren't wearing my best clothes. I lent you what is practically a new suit this morning because you wanted to make a good impression on Mary Coppinger, and a soaking in salt water won't be at all good for the trousers. I wish I'd asked you to change before we came out. However, it can't be helped now."

"I'll take them off and carry them, if you like.

I shall be able to keep them dry all right, unless we have to swim."

"Oh, there'll be no swimming," said Royce. "Are you sure you don't mind? It'll be quite enough, really, if you take off the trousers. I don't suppose we'll be in deeper than our waists."

Basil slipped off the trousers at once and folded them up.

"Thanks awfully," said Royce. "I did not want to have those trousers ruined. Besides, you'll really be more comfortable afterwards. You'll have a nice dry pair to put on when we get to shore again, and that's far better than having wet things lapping against your legs all night. Also—and this is a point that you ought to consider—you'll look nice in dry trousers when you meet Mary Coppinger. Girls are greatly influenced by a man's clothes. You may take my word for that. By the way, I hope you've been careful to fold them up by the creases down the legs. They're beautiful creases, or were when I gave them to you this morning. I took them straight out of a patent trousers press, which my wife gave me for a Christmas box."

Royce did not take off his own trousers, in spite of all he said about the comfort of having dry legs; but that may have been because he did not care what Mary Coppinger thought of his appearance. Basil, whose shirt tails were flapping about in the breeze, cut short what might have been a long speech about trousers presses, creases and women's views on clothes.

"Come on," he said. "And let's get it over before we're frozen."

They waded slowly through water about two feet deep and reached a rocky shore at the far side. Basil put on the trousers again, and the most difficult part of their walk began. The rocks were rough and it was quite impossible to see the jagged points and crevices. Both men often stumbled and sometimes fell. Royce complained that he had gashed his hands and barked his shins. Basil was in a worse case. He was miserably aware that his first tumble had cut a wide hole in the left knee of Royce's trousers.

At last they reached the old tower at the end of the point. Originally it must have been a square, uncompromising building. Four straight high walls, pierced with very narrow windows, having by way of adornment four projecting stones set high up in the roof. From these an ancient Queen of Connaught, who built and owned the keep, used to hang her enemies when she caught them. The tower in the days of its glory must have been a striking sight with four wriggling kerns suspended from these gargoyles, and the queen, perhaps, with her crown on her head, looking out of one window after another to enjoy the administration of her justice.

But of all the glory and the strength only three broken walls remained, and the deep, rock-sheltered pool below, where the queen kept her ships at anchor. She had strings, so history says, tied to the ships, led through the window of her bedroom and fastened to her toes at night so that no evil man could make off with her fleet without waking her.

Royce, who was leading the way, walked right up against the wall of the tower before he saw it. Basil,

following a little to the right of his friend, tripped over a rope, and suffered another painful fall.

"I'm tangled up in a rope," he complained.

"Good," said Royce.

The comment sounded unsympathetic, but he explained what he meant a moment later.

"That must be the mooring rope of Mahony's boat," he said. "She's down below you in a pool among the rocks. It's a comfort to know she's here all safe."

Basil was on his feet again and was pulling at the rope.

"One end is made fast to a rock at my feet," he said. "The other leads down to the sea."

"That's all right," said Royce. "The boat's there, though we can't see her. I wonder if old Mahony himself is about anywhere."

He whistled softly, and then a little louder. Basil sat down and slipped his finger into the tear on his left knee. He groaned when he found that it was a couple of inches long. He wondered how he could best apologize to Royce, and whether it would be possible without offence to offer him a present of a new pair of trousers.

Royce called aloud :

"Mahony! Hullo, Mahony! Mahony!"

"With the row the waves are making on the rocks outside," he said, "I may just as well shout as loud as I can. Neither Mahony nor anyone else will hear me twenty yards away."

The sky grew faintly lighter. It became possible to discern the outlines of the old tower. Then Mahony's boat became visible, rocking uneasily in the pool where she lay moored.

"The moon's rising," said Royce. "It must be half-past eleven. Who'd have thought it would have taken us all that time to get here? I expect Mahony's up at the house waiting for us. Come on."

Basil's muscles were beginning to stiffen and his left leg was rather painful, but he was glad to get on his feet and move on. In a few minutes he would be in the presence of Miss Coppinger, with a night of adventure before him in her company. For the sake of such a reward he would cheerfully have endured the tearing of the skin from every joint in his body.

Royce insisted on extreme caution for fear of attracting the attention of Jimmy Rafferty's sentries. There was a rough path, winding among rocks and whin bushes from the old tower to Lishreen House. But Royce did not go by it.

"If Rafferty's men are anywhere," he said, "they'll be on the path, and it will be a great deal better for us to tumble about a bit among the whins than to run into them."

Basil and Royce tumbled about, and they were much prickled by the bushes. Basil picked a dozen or more sharp spikes out of his bare knee, his hands, and even his face. But their caution was rewarded. After they had gone about a hundred yards they saw a flash of light in front of them and a little to their left, where the path ran. Royce pulled Basil down among the bushes and they lay still, watching. The light flashed again, shone steadily for a while, and then went out. It seemed that some one was making his way along the path, with an electric torch in his hand, which he used occasionally, switching it

on when he came to difficult places. Now and then the sound of voices, borne on gusts of wind, reached Basil and Royce. But it was impossible to hear the words spoken or to recognize the voices.

They lay very still. The men on the path—there seemed to be two of them—passed on, going in the direction of the old tower.

“Rafferty’s sentries,” said Royce. “I wonder what the devil they’re going that way for. It’ll be a bad business if they find Mahony’s boat and cut her adrift. Thank goodness there’s a cloud over the moon and it’s getting pretty dark again. They won’t see her, and unless they trip over the rope as you did, they’re hardly likely to find her. Anyhow, our way ought to be clear now as far as the house.”

They went on, still avoiding the path. Royce was right in his guess. They reached the house without meeting anyone else.

They found Sir Amos and Mary sitting together in the smoking-room. An empty picture frame hung from its nail above the chimney-piece. The picture itself, carefully rolled in an old oilskin coat, lay on the table. Lady Coppinger was not there, nor was Mahony.

“If I were you, Sir Amos,” said Royce, “I’d start the party off at once.”

In the excitement of the adventures he had been through Royce had for once forgotten his pose of official neutrality. He gave his advice without attempting to disguise it as a solution of a hypothetical problem.

“A couple of Rafferty’s boys have gone down

towards the old tower," he said, "but I expect they're only patrolling the path. It will be quite easy to avoid them, for they're going about with an electric torch, besides talking in loud voices."

"I must wait for Mahony," said Sir Amos.

"Isn't he here?" said Royce. "His boat is down at the old tower all right, but he isn't in her. I made sure he'd be here, drinking tea with Lady Coppinger in the kitchen."

"Her ladyship's in bed," said Sir Amos, "which is the proper place for her, and I haven't set eyes on Mahony."

"He must be somewhere about," said Royce. "His boat is there, and he knew you were going to make the attempt to get off to-night."

"If old Mahony said he'd be there," said Mary, "he will be there. You can trust him to keep his word."

"But he's not there," said Royce. "That's just my point. His boat's there, but he isn't. We whistled and shouted for him. He couldn't have helped hearing us if he'd been there."

"He hasn't been here," said Sir Amos, "since ten o'clock. He left us then to get the boat ready for sea."

A fear, which no one expressed in words, held their minds. Mahony might have fallen into the hands of some of Rafferty's men after he left the house. While they sat talking he might be lying among damp bushes, tied up as a captive. He might—there was a worse possibility still. Rafferty had a drastic way of dealing with inconvenient enemies.

Sir Amos assumed a confidence which no one felt.

"He's bound to be here soon," he said. "We must wait for him. There's nothing else to be done."

They waited for an hour, uneasily. Royce talked incessantly and fluently, but the stream of his words stopped abruptly now and then when some unusual sound fell upon their ears. Sir Amos fidgeted with the two revolvers which lay on the table beside him. Occasionally he shifted the position of the shotgun which leaned against the arm of his chair. Royce had been quite right in saying that the old man would be ready for an attack on his house. More warlike men than Cohen or Kaitcer might have hesitated to face him. Jimmy Rafferty, though he called himself a soldier, preferred stratagem and ambush to an attack upon a grim well-armed old man.

Of the whole party Basil was probably the best content. He was bruised and sore. Like the others, he was nervous and excited, but he was able to sit by the fire and gaze at Mary.

In the end it was she who roused the party to action and gave utterance to the fear which had grown to a certainty in their minds.

"We'd better go without Mahony," she said. "They must have caught him on the way down to the boat. I hope—oh, I do hope they won't do him any harm."

"If they've got Mahony," said Sir Amos, "they may be a bit off their guard. They'll think that we can't do anything without him."

"Particularly as they don't know that Price and I are here," said Royce, "and they can't know that. They think you've no one with you except Miss Mary."

"It's a nasty night," said Sir Amos, "blowing quite hard from the south-west, and with the turn of the tide there'll be a sea running. I wonder——"

He looked at Mary doubtfully.

"I can take the boat out to Inishraher all right," she said.

"Damn this gout and rheumatism," said Sir Amos. "If I could manage to limp down to the boat anyhow I could sit and steer even if I died of it afterwards."

"But I can do it, Dad," said Mary. "I know every rock in the bay just as well as you do or old Mahony himself, and I'll keep clear of the race off the Corrigeen Glas reef."

"It's all very well saying you know the bay," said Sir Amos. "I dare say you do know it well enough to go lifting lobster pots in broad daylight, but it's a different business finding your way on a night when you can't see your hand in front of your face. I can tell you I'd be nervous about trusting Mahony himself to-night."

"I can do it," said Mary.

"You can't do it alone," said Sir Amos.

He looked across the room at Basil. But Basil needed no glance of appeal.

"I'm ready to go, sir," he said at once.

"Don't make any mistake about what you're in for," said Sir Amos. "This isn't going to be a day out on the Solent in a hundred-ton yawl during Cowes Regatta."

"Oh, I know that," said Basil, "and—well, I don't want to swagger, but I can sail a boat. I really can. Of course, I don't know the rocks or the tides, but if Miss Coppinger will steer——"

"Well," said Sir Amos, "we've got to risk it, I suppose. There's nothing else to be done."

"I'd go with you," said Royce, "only that I'm invariably sick if there's the slightest sea. And besides, you know, I can't really take any active part in——"

"Don't pile up excuses, Charlie," said Sir Amos. "We know all about your professional objections, and the miserable fact that you're looking after my creditors' interests. Sea-sickness is quite a sufficient reason for not going without that. You'd be a horrible nuisance to Mary and Mr. Price if you were wallowing about in the bottom of the boat, tangling yourself up in the sheets and tripping them every time they had to go about."

"All the same," said Royce, "I wish I could go. I shouldn't mind being sea-sick; and I'm in a very awkward position anyway. However, I don't know—don't positively and officially know—what you've got in that roll of oilskin or where you're going to take it, so——"

Sir Amos cut him short.

"You're to take the tiller, Mary," he said. "Mr. Price must mind the sheets and bail. You'll have to do a lot of bailing, I expect, before you're at Inishraher. You ought to be able to lie the course to the point of the reef with this wind, especially as the tide will be dragging you up to windward all the time. But stand out well beyond the point. Don't attempt to go about till you're half a mile out to sea. Mind what I'm saying now. Keep clear of the point of Corrigeen Glas. There'll be a tide rip there this minute that would swamp a forty-ton lobby. Once

you're clear of that you can go about and slack away your sheets. It'll be a reach down to the island. You'll have no trouble then if you mind your helm and Price is ready with the main-sheet when the squalls come."

"There's the short cut through the reef," said Mary.

"There is," said Sir Amos grimly, "but—— Would you like to try it?"

Mary thought for a moment. Then she spoke with the air of one who makes a candid confession.

"No. I wouldn't. I'd funk it."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said Sir Amos. "I'd funk it myself to-night, and I've been sailing the bay for forty years longer than you have. I don't believe even Mahony would care to risk it in the dark. It won't be pleasant, Mr. Price, threshing half a mile out to sea to-night to get clear of the tide race round the point of the reef, but you may take my word for it it'll be a deal pleasanter than trying the passage through."

Mary slipped out of the room and came back a few minutes later wearing a yellow oilskin coat and a sou'-wester. She brought with her an old coat of Sir Amos's for Basil.

"I suppose," said Royce, "that you haven't got a pair of oilskin trousers for him?"

"I have not," said Sir Amos. "He'll just have to get his legs wet."

"It isn't his legs I'm thinking of," said Royce. "It's my own best trousers."

Basil took the precious picture under his arm. He and Mary started.

“It’s infernally risky,” said Sir Amos, “but there’s one good point about it. No one will ever think of our trying to get the picture out to Inishraher a night like this, especially when we haven’t got Mahony.”

“Let’s hope they won’t be drowned.”

“Oh, they won’t be drowned. Mary has quite sense enough to get the mainsail off the boat and run home under the jib if she finds it too bad.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE are—so we are told—young men who like being petted by women, usually by women older than themselves, among cushions, in warm, scented rooms. These are generally very intellectual or very artistic young men, gifted with genius, afflicted with soft muscle, thin hair, and manicured hands. There are, also, more normal, perhaps we may say more desirable, young men, who prefer girls to middle-aged women, and like to feel that they are in the position of protectors rather than lapdogs. These believe that girls are creatures who ought to lean upon strong right arms and find protection there. The girl may object to playing this part. No one knows whether she really does object or not. But, if educated after the approved fashions of our time, she says, often and loudly, that she objects strongly.

Basil Price was a normal and entirely healthy young man. The slightly faded, highly powdered ladies, who hold the hands of young poets in dimly lighted drawing-rooms, made no appeal at all to him. He had met many of them, for they take nearly as much interest in politics, or perhaps politicians, as they do in poetry, or poets. They always frightened and rather disgusted Basil. He preferred those who

used less scent and lived more in the open air. He had fallen suddenly and deeply in love with Mary Coppinger, who had never in her life possessed so much as a piece of scented soap, and spent most of her time on the sea or in the fields.

The door of Lishreen House closed behind them and they stepped cautiously into the dark. Basil felt, with a glow of delight, that it was his part to guide Mary Coppinger's feet through difficult ways, to guard her against all kinds of perils, perhaps to fight for her, certainly to sail the ship which carried her through strange tumultuous seas. Mary, if not physically—and he hoped for that too—must spiritually lean on him and cling to him.

But Mary had no idea of behaving as a timid maid. She did not, indeed, announce her strength or make a boast of her independence. She simply took command of the expedition as if it were natural for her to lead. From the moment they left the house she gave her orders to Basil and expected them to be obeyed. There was not the smallest sign of fear or weakness about her, and Basil soon found that she was better able to command than he was.

Heavy masses of cloud swept across the sky and obscured the moon. At such times the night was dark, and Mary strode forward rapidly, telling Basil to follow her. He did so, stumbling a little on the rough ground, plunging ankle-deep into boggy patches. Mary, when she came to such places, leaped lightly and confidently from one tussock to another. Basil, struggling after her, became rather breathless. Then the cloud wrack would sweep by and the moon shone dimly for a while through filmy mist, or startlingly

bright in a patch of bare sky. At these times Mary stopped, crouched low, and pulled Basil down beside her. The touch of her hand thrilled him; but he was perfectly well aware that there was no responsive thrill in her. If she thought of him at all, it was simply as a companion in adventure. He might have been another girl like herself, or a dog, or she might have had no companion at all. Indeed, he was very little in her mind. She was bent on avoiding the eyes of Jimmy Rafferty's sentries or anyone else who might be spying on them; intent mainly on reaching the boat safely.

After a particularly arduous rush through the dark, the moon shone out on them suddenly and they crouched together—even Mary breathless this time—among some whin bushes. They could see the old tower fifty yards in front of them, its walls casting sharp black shadows on the ground. Between them and the tower there was no cover at all, not a bush, not a rock, nothing but a space of flat ground strewn with stones.

"Wait," said Mary. "Wait till it's dark again, and then we'll make a spurt. Once we're in the shadow of the tower it'll be easy enough to get to the boat. The moment we're on board we must cut the mooring-ropes, get the oars, and pull her out. I'll ship the rudder. We can get the sails on her outside."

She crouched among the bushes, looking upwards. She was watching the moon, which shone obstinately bright. A cloud, fleecy bordered, but deep and black in the centre, was moving swiftly across the sky. She laid her hand on Basil's arm. The

outblown fringe of the cloud reached the moon, and the light grew dim and watery. The black mass followed, and it was suddenly dark.

"Now," she said.

They sprang to their feet, and dashed across the level ground. They reached the tower while the darkness lasted.

"I don't think any of Rafferty's men can possibly have seen us," she said. "Even if they were watching for us, and it's not likely they were, they couldn't have seen us. Now for the boat."

Feeling her way along the ruined wall, she crept round the tower in the darkness. The moon shone clear again through the fleecy tail of the cloud. She stopped abruptly and turned to Basil.

"Where's the boat?" she said.

Basil stepped past her, stood out clear of the shadow of the walls, and gazed at the pool below it. The boat was not there.

"It's gone," he said.

"Are you sure it was there?" said Mary. "Quite sure?"

"Certain," said Basil. "I saw it. Royce saw it too. I tripped over the moorings of it. We couldn't possibly both of us have been mistaken."

He moved forward as he spoke, down towards the sea, as if by going to the place where the boat had lain he might have been able to find it. Mary ran quickly after him and dragged him back.

"If they've got the boat," she said, "they'll be looking out for us, and whatever happens we mustn't be caught."

"Perhaps," said Basil, "they haven't got her.

Perhaps she's worked loose from her moorings and drifted away."

"Nonsense," said Mary. "Old Mahony doesn't moor boats like that. Besides, if she did drift she'd drift on shore with this wind, and not out to sea. It's what I say. They've caught Mahony. They've found the boat and now they're waiting for us."

Basil made no further attempt to argue with her, for he felt sure that she was right. He remembered the men with the flash-light who had gone along the path towards the tower while he and Royce lay among the bushes. He had no doubt in his mind as to who they were, and where they were going. But even if he had been ready to argue against his own convictions, he could not have done so for very long. He saw, not very clearly, but unmistakably enough, two men crossing the bare space of ground between the bushes and the tower, the space which he and Mary had rushed across ten minutes earlier. Mary saw them too, but only for a moment. A fresh cloud covered the moon, and it was dark again.

"Come with me, quick," said Mary. "I don't believe they saw us. Come quick." They crept round the tower and came to a place where the outer wall was broken down. They stumbled over the débris of fallen stones into the inky blackness of the square within. Mary seized Basil's hand and led him over slabs of fallen masonry to a corner. She felt before her with her hands.

"There's the remains of an old stairway somewhere here," she said. "It doesn't lead anywhere, but it runs up along the wall, and even if the moon comes out again we shall be in the shadow. We

ought to be pretty well hidden if we climb it. But for goodness sake be careful."

The warning was needed. Basil tripped over the corner of the bottom step and fell. He scrambled to his feet again. Once more the moon gave a little light, though very little in that corner of the tower. He saw Mary standing four steps above him on the stone stairway. A dozen steps or so further up the stairway stopped, abruptly broken away. The steps were very narrow and steep. Their edges were worn, and they were slippery with wet and a thin growth of lichen. There was no kind of rail or guarding banister.

Mary ran up boldly. Basil climbed cautiously after her, clinging to the oilskin-covered package. Mary stood on a narrow platform made by the top-most step. Beyond her was a sheer drop into the darkness where the staircase was broken away. Basil crouched two steps below her, and could hear that she was breathing in quick short gasps.

"Did they see us?" she whispered. "If they didn't it's all right. They'll never come on us here unless they search for us; but of course if they caught sight of us outside they will search, and then——"

Her voice was trembling, but it was with excitement, not with fear. Basil was curiously reminded of the thrilling emotions of games of hide-and-seek played many years before on winter evenings in a dark old house.

"Perhaps they didn't see us," he whispered back. "I don't think they could. They were in the moonlight. We were in the shadow."

He was wrong. A whistle was blown shrilly out-

side the tower. A voice from some distance replied with a shout. Then another shout followed, this time from a different direction. It was plain that the two men whom they had seen crossing the open space were only part of a larger body and that the tower was surrounded.

"They did see us," said Mary.

"Either that," said Basil, "or they've been following us all along. They may have been on our track ever since we left the house. Anyhow, they have us cornered now."

While he spoke he worked diligently with the blade of his knife and then with his bare fingers at the wall beside him. He loosened a large stone. It was a crumbling wall, loose-jointed, mortarless. The working loose of the stone was not a very difficult business. A stone, even a large heavy one, is not an effective weapon of defence against a man with a gun or a revolver. But if anyone attempted to climb the stairway without shooting, Basil was in a strong position and hoped to do some damage with his stone. He meant to fight, however the matter might go in the end.

Centuries before, the Queen of Connaught, who owned the tower, had been accustomed to defend it by dropping the stones from its walls on the heads of the attacking body below. Basil meant to do more than drop his stone. He meant to hurl it with all his might at—he hoped at the head of Jimmy Rafferty. He laid it ready at his feet and set to work to dig out another stone. Mary saw or guessed what he was at. From the framework of an old window just above her she detached a slab of limestone and

passed it down to Basil. She was in full sympathy with his plan for a desperate defence.

The voices of the men outside the tower were plainly audible. They were closing in from different directions, shouting to each other in the dark.

"I seen one of them," said one voice. "I seen one of them, and I'm not sure but I seen two. It's my belief that they're within, in the inside of the tower this minute."

"It's where they must be," said some one else. "There's no other place for them to get, only there."

Basil, working with grim energy, dug out another stone. Mary dragged at the side of the window above her.

"Pass them up to me," she whispered. "I'll hand them down to you as you want them."

"Come out of that, now," said a voice outside. "Come out of that. You may as well come first as last, for we know you're there."

Neither Basil nor Mary moved. Their position was nearly hopeless. But there is always the hundredth or the thousandth chance to count on. The heroes of history are the men who gamble against big odds and refuse to surrender so long as there is the faintest possibility of holding out or escaping. Also a kind of rage, a primitive lust of fighting, possessed Basil. He felt a violent hatred of Jimmy Rafferty, and wanted to get one good blow in at him before the end came. About what happened afterwards he did not think at all, nor care.

"I'm thinking we'll have to go in after them and fetch them out," said a voice outside the tower. "Will

I go, or will you, Kevin, or would it be best if the two of us went together? "

"I'll go myself," said another voice. "Give me the torch now, and let the rest of you stand back behind the wall for fear they shoot."

A tall man stepped across the débris of fallen masonry into the tower. The moon shone out suddenly at the moment. Even among the shadows inside it was possible to see. Basil, standing with a great stone raised in his two hands, saw that the approaching figure wore a well-known, a most welcome uniform. He laid the stone down softly and turned to Mary.

"Thank God, it's the police," he said.

But Mary seemed to find no great joy in the discovery.

"We don't want to be caught by the police," she said, "any more than by Rafferty. Dad will be furious."

Sergeant Cussen was a bold man, bold to the point of recklessness. It was very likely that he would be fired on by desperate men, but he stood calmly in the moonlight, flashing his torch into the dark corners of the tower. For the time he was searching on the level of the ground and had not seen the broken staircase.

"The police won't arrest us," Basil whispered.

"Yes they will," said Mary. "They'd arrest anyone at this time of night."

"But we're not doing anything wrong," he said.

He was not quite sure about that. Royce had made him a little uneasy with his talk about defrauding Sir Amos's creditors. But he was certainly not doing anything violently criminal, and he felt a desire,

natural enough in a man who had always lived among law-abiding people, to place Miss Coppinger under the protection of the official guardians of society. There was still the chance that Jimmy Rafferty and his men might be lurking somewhere in the shadows outside.

"Give me the picture," Mary whispered, "and you go down. If they get you they may think there's no one else, and go away. Then I'll slip home afterwards."

Basil did not like the plan. He had no kind of objection to giving himself up to the police-sergeant, whom he regarded as a friendly power. But he was very much afraid of leaving Mary alone in the old tower. He wanted to remonstrate with her and explain his point of view. But she gave him no chance. She took the picture from his hands and pushed him downwards. He went slipping and stumbling noisily down the staircase to the ground.

Before he could make a dignified surrender or speak a word of explanation, Sergeant Cussen laid a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"I have you now, my boyo," he said, "and it will be best for you to come along with me without making any resistance."

Basil meant to address the sergeant with dignity and assurance. But two constables stepped forward and pinioned his arms. It is very difficult to be dignified or even cool when your arms are twisted behind you in such a way as to hurt severely. Nevertheless Basil managed to speak in a manner which he felt to be impressive enough.

"You probably don't know who I am," he said.

"You will scarcely insist on arresting me when you do. My name is Basil Price and I am private secretary to Lord Edmund Troyte."

The sergeant did not believe that. No police-sergeant would have believed such a statement made in the middle of a stormy night among the shadows of a ruined tower on the coast of Connaught. But Basil spoke without a trace of an Irish accent, clipping his words sharply after the fashion of educated Englishmen. This surprised the sergeant.

"Will you tell me that all over again?" he said, "and say it slow."

Basil repeated his statement emphatically and very slowly. It produced its effect, a very considerable effect, on the sergeant's mind, but not exactly the effect that Basil intended.

Sergeant Cussen had been aware all day that Jimmy Rafferty and his men were particularly busy about something. He came to the conclusion, naturally enough, that they were engaged in furthering some kind of political conspiracy. He traced them to the grounds of Lishreen House, and came upon the picket which Royce had seen near the old tower. The men of the picket escaped from him, but he argued that they were preparing to land arms for the use of their friends and themselves. He made his arrangements for capturing them during the night. Unfortunately, Jimmy Rafferty knew as much about the movements of the police as they did about him. He and his men got off. Old Mahony's boat, moored securely under the tower, convinced the sergeant that his guess was right and that the smuggling of a cargo of arms was being attempted.

Then he arrested Basil, who spoke like an Englishman and was plainly not one of Jimmy Rafferty's band. The sergeant was immensely elated.

Years before, at the very beginning of Ireland's troubles, a gentleman bearing an honourable English title was arrested on another part of the Irish coast and found to be a chief conspirator. The sergeant thought that he had repeated this coup and made another important capture.

"Hold on to him tight," he said to the constables, "till I go round and see is there any more of them."

"There were two of them," said one of the constables. "There were two, for I seen them, and the comrade of this fellow will be somewhere about."

"There is no necessity for violence," said Basil. "I came forward voluntarily to place myself under your protection. I have good reason to believe that there's a man called Rafferty——"

The sergeant was not listening to him. He had gone to look for the suspected "comrade," and was making his way towards the broken staircase. One of the constables twisted Basil's arm by way of reply. This hurt him acutely. He began to think that perhaps Royce, Sir Amos, and old Mahony had been right in wishing to avoid all contact with the police. The Royal Irish Constabulary seemed strangely different from the placid, respectful police of England.

"Come down out of that," said Sergeant Cussen loudly.

He had caught sight of Mary, and stood at the bottom of the staircase flashing his torch on her.

Basil, in spite of the pain of his arm, shouted to

her to come down, and not to throw the large stones she had ready at the sergeant's head. He did not like the ways of the Irish police; but he shrank from the thought of killing or stunning one of them. To his great relief Mary dropped her stone quietly, and came down, holding the picture in her hands.

"It's a girl," said the sergeant.

"Or it might be a man dressed up as a girl," said one of the constables. "I've heard of the like."

"Anyway, whether it is or not," said the sergeant, "we have her safe, and the girls is as bad as the men."

"I've seen some of them," said the constable, "that's worse nor any man."

"I'm Miss Coppinger," said Mary, "the daughter of Sir Amos Coppinger, of Lishreen House."

"You may be, or you may not be," said the sergeant, "but it's not likely that you are. What would the daughter of Sir Amos Coppinger be doing landing guns in the middle of the night out of a boat? But I have the boat safe, so I have, and there'll be no guns landed in her to-night, nor any other night."

"Oh, it was you took the boat, was it?" said Mary.

"It was," said the sergeant, "and if you want to know, I have it sent away safe to Lishreen harbour. What's more, I'll have the two of you safe before long, locked up in the barrack till such time as you're put on your trial."

"You're making a perfectly absurd series of blunders," said Basil.

He was suffering a good deal, and was beginning to lose his temper.

"We're not landing arms," he went on. "Nobody's landing arms, or trying to. Where on earth do you think we'd get arms to land?"

"We'll see about that when the time comes," said the sergeant. "But if that isn't arms or ammunition that the young lady has in her hand, what is it?"

He pointed to the oilskin roll which Mary was carrying.

"That," said Mary, "is a portrait of my great-grandmother, or my great-great-grandmother, I'm not sure which. In fact, it might be my grandmother with three greats in front of her. There now, I've told you what ought to be a dead secret because I don't want to be marched off to your old barrack as a prisoner. So I hope now you'll let us both go. But for goodness' sake don't tell anyone else what I've told you."

"The Lord save us," said one of the constables who was holding Basil.

He was genuinely astonished at Mary's statement. So was the sergeant, and for a minute or two he did not speak. The constable repeated his pious prayer three times before the sergeant recovered sufficiently to say anything.

"If you think," said the sergeant at last, "that you can get out of the trouble that you're in by playing and making jokes you're mistaken. Come with me now, and come quietly if you don't want the handcuffs put on you."

"If you drag us off to your barrack to-night," said Basil angrily, "I'll take an action against you for false imprisonment to-morrow. It's perfectly monstrous that innocent people who are doing no

harm of any kind should be arrested and threatened in this way."

"You can say that to the magistrate when you're brought before him," said the sergeant.

Mary, who was more accustomed to the way things are done in Ireland, kept her temper.

"Sergeant," she said, "if you don't believe that it's a portrait of my great-grandmother which I'm carrying, just open the parcel and see. It's easy enough to tell whether a thing's a picture or a gun. Here, look at it."

She stripped off the oilskin covering and an inner wrapping of calico from the canvas. The sergeant flashed his torch on the picture as she unrolled it. He was convinced that whether it was a portrait of her great-grandmother or not, it was certainly not a weapon of any kind.

"And now," said Mary, "if you don't believe I'm Miss Coppinger will you call at the house and ask? You're bound to pass pretty near the door on the way down to the village. It won't take you ten minutes to go in. My father, Sir Amos Coppinger, will be there, and I expect Mr. Royce, the solicitor, will be there, too. Either one or other of them will tell you who we are."

The sergeant was a little shaken by his discovery of the picture. He still believed that Basil and Mary were engaged in some desperate conspiracy, but he agreed to call at Lishreen House as he passed.

"I see no harm in doing that," he said. "But let me tell you that, whoever you are, and whoever you're not, the two of you will be locked up to-night."

CHAPTER XIX

SIR AMOS and Royce sat together, one on each side of the fire, after Basil and Mary left them. At first they talked about the voyage in Mahony's boat to Inishraher. Sir Amos affected a cheerful disregard for any actual danger, but it was easy to see that he was very anxious. A sudden gust, shaking the window, made him pause in his talk and sit silent for a minute. An unusually loud howl of the wind in the wide old chimney set his hands fidgeting nervously.

"But I had to let them go, Charlie," he said. "There was no way out of it. Even if I could have kept that picture out of the hands of Cohen and Kaitcer, it would have been no good to me. You'd have sold it up, along with my old sticks, at the auction. Wouldn't you, now?"

"I would, of course," said Royce. "I'm bound to sell every blessed thing you have. By the way, I wonder what the picture's worth. I haven't the slightest idea."

"I don't really know how these things go," said Sir Amos. "It's a Gainsborough right enough. It's been here ever since it was painted. Lady Marion, my great-grandmother, was by way of being a beauty, and I suppose that's why Gainsborough painted

her. I was counting on getting £500 for it when I first made up my mind to save it from the auction."

"As much as that?" said Royce.

He was surprised. An able and a cute man of business in Connaught may be totally ignorant of the value of pictures. Royce could have told within a pound or two the value of a horse, a field, or a house. But the name of Gainsborough meant nothing at all to him.

"I'm inclined to think now that it's worth more. I shouldn't wonder, but I might get a thousand for it if I had it over in London. Kaitcer was ready to give me £50 down on the nail for it yesterday. He didn't actually name the picture, but I knew it was it he wanted. He and Cohen wouldn't offer £50 for a thing unless they were sure it was worth twenty times as much."

"I wonder Cohen didn't wait for the auction," said Royce. "He'd have got it for a tenner then."

"He might, or he might not," said Sir Amos. "There was always the chance of some one else knowing what it was worth. He had to consider that I might know, and though I couldn't buy it myself I might have given the tip to you or some other friend, and then the picture would have been run up to pretty near its proper price, and Cohen would have lost his bargain."

"I don't believe," said Royce, sturdily sceptical, "that there's a man in Connaught who'd give £1,000 for the picture, whatever you told him about it."

"I'd be shot before I'd do it myself," said Sir Amos, "and it's jolly hard to believe that that dirty old canvas could be worth the money. But just look what Cohen and Kaitcer are doing to get

it. I don't attach very much importance to Cohen ; but Kaitcer is a superior kind of man. Unless he was pretty keen he wouldn't have hired Rafferty to help him and run the risk of getting into jail on a charge of murder or arson. A man like Kaitcer can't enjoy doing that sort of thing. If the picture isn't a big prize, bigger than I ever thought it was, Kaitcer wouldn't be here. No, Charlie, absurd as it sounds, I think we may safely say that picture's worth £1,000."

"A thousand pounds would pay your debts and leave a bit over," said Royce.

"A very small bit, not near enough for me."

"Outside of the mortgages on the property," said Royce, "which are all pretty well secured, I don't suppose you owe more than £900 or so of miscellaneous debts. I don't know of more, anyhow, and I'm in the confidence of your creditors. If the picture is really worth £1,000——"

"If it is," said Sir Amos, "I'm not going to fritter it away paying debts. I'd rather owe the £900 and keep the £1,000 any day than pay a lot of scoundrels and have no more than a beggarly hundred left for myself at the end."

"I dare say I'd feel that way if I were in your shoes," said Royce. "But—if that picture is really worth £1,000 your creditors really ought to be paid."

"Charlie," said Sir Amos, "I've been talking to you as if you were a gentleman. If I thought you were going to come the damned lawyer over me I wouldn't have said a word about the picture."

"All I meant," said Royce, "is that *if* I believed the picture was worth a thousand—but then I don't believe it. The thing's absurd on the face of it."

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe and rose.

"I may as well be getting home to bed," he said. "If Miss Mary and Price get back at all, it won't be till to-morrow morning, and there's no sense in my losing my night's sleep."

Sir Amos yawned.

"I'll have to sit up for them," he said, "and it's dismal work sitting by myself, listening to the storm and wondering whether Jimmy Rafferty will turn up to try and murder me. Stay a bit, Charlie, and brew some punch. There'll be a kettle in the kitchen, and I've lemons and things here besides the whisky."

"With your gout," said Royce, "you oughtn't to be drinking punch."

"With my income," said Sir Amos, "I oughtn't to have run into debt. With my position I oughtn't to have married my cook. After being brought up by a very religious mother, I oughtn't to be trying to steal my own picture. But—— Did you never do what you oughtn't to, Charlie?"

"Well," said Royce, "I won't deny that I may have, once or twice."

"Then don't preach to me, but go and make the punch."

The making of the punch took some time, because Sir Amos was most particular that it should be made with close attention to his favourite recipe. The drinking took even longer, because there was a great deal of it and it was very hot. Royce was in the middle of his second tumbler, Sir Amos had just finished his third, when there was a loud knocking at the door.

Sir Amos laid his tumbler down and picked up one of the revolvers.

"Mary would never make a noise like that at the door," he said. "I fancy we're going to have a call from Jimmy Rafferty. Do you know, Charlie, I'm rather glad. Just push that lamp-shade round a bit so that the light falls on the door."

Sir Amos, who used to sit up reading every evening, had a plan of his own with his lamp. Three-quarters of the globe of it was shrouded with opaque brown paper. The light streamed on to his book from the remaining section, leaving most of the room in darkness. When Royce pushed the brown paper round, as Sir Amos ordered him, the light fell clear and strong on the door of the room. The chair on which Sir Amos sat was in shadow.

The knocking continued, loud and imperative.

"Go and open the door, will you, Charlie?" said Sir Amos. "You'll be all right. They won't touch you. Put up your hands if they order you, and tell them the way to this room. Point out the door to them, but don't come back here yourself. Slip into the kitchen or round any corner. It won't be particularly safe just inside this door or in the passage. I think I'll give our friend Rafferty two barrels of the shotgun to start with."

"That'll probably kill him," said Royce. "If you fire two barrels at him from that distance you're nearly sure to kill him."

"It's quite time somebody killed Jimmy Rafferty," said Sir Amos. "He's been holding the whole country in terror for the last year. It's quite time now that he got a dose of his own medicine. Go on now and open the door."

He lifted the shotgun from the floor as he spoke and laid it across his knees. Then, before Royce left the room, there came a loud wail from the upper part of the house. It rose high and clear above the sound of the continued knocking. Lady Coppinger had been awakened from her first sleep. She had got out of bed and was on her way downstairs.

"For the Lord's sake," she cried, "don't be breaking down the door or burning the house on us. Am not I going to you as quick as I'm able? Hold on now for one minute, and I'll let you in."

"Let her go to the door," said Sir Amos. "They certainly won't touch her. And do you get down behind me, Charlie, out of my line of fire. The charge of shot won't scatter much in that distance, but I don't want to run the risk of pickling you."

"Don't start shooting," said Royce, "till you see who it is."

"It's Jimmy Rafferty," said Sir Amos. "Who else could it be? Mary wouldn't knock that way. She wouldn't knock at all, for she knows she's nothing to do but to turn the handle and walk in."

"It's my belief," said Royce, "that it's the police. Nobody else but the police would knock at a door that way, as if the whole world belonged to them, and they meant to give notice to God Almighty and the devil that they both must clear out."

It was a curious procession which entered the room three minutes later. Lady Coppinger came first, barefooted, with an old brown shawl draped around her. Her grey hair was hanging about her face in thin wisps. She was wailing out a pitiful appeal to Sergeant Cussen.

"For the love of the Lord, sergeant, let her go. Arrah what harm did ever the girl do to you that you have her took? Mary, allana, will you beg the sergeant's pardon for whatever it was, and maybe he'll say no more about it? Wirrasthrue, but it's a sore thing for me that always tried to rear you decent to see you the way you are now."

Mary's position was indeed sufficiently unpleasant. Sergeant Cussen and a constable, holding her arms, led her into the room. Behind them came two other constables, dragging Basil. It was he who spoke first.

"Royce," he said, "tell these idiots to let us go."

"This young woman," said the sergeant, "is after stating that she's the daughter of Sir Amos Coppinger."

He looked round the room as he spoke. He knew Royce by appearance, but he was a new-comer in the neighbourhood, and he had never seen Sir Amos. No one present looked the least like a baronet of ancient lineage. Nor did the room itself come up to the sergeant's idea of—what a gentleman's room should be. He was puzzled and deeply suspicious.

"What the devil do you mean by dragging my daughter about in that way?" said Sir Amos. "Let her go at once."

"Oh, she's your daughter, is she?" said the sergeant.

It was quite plain to him that the disreputable-looking old man in a chair beside the fire could not possibly be Sir Amos Coppinger. He felt that he had already made sure of the falseness of Mary's statement. But one of the three constables had been stationed in Lishreen for some time. He had seen Sir Amos. He had often seen Mary, and he

recognized her now when she stood in the light. He stepped forward and whispered to the sergeant.

"Let her go at once," said Sir Amos. "And let that young gentleman go too, and then clear out of this and stop behaving like a born idiot."

But this, it seemed, was not the proper way to address Sergeant Cussen. A feeble man, strong only in his support of his official position, might have given way. But Cussen was a man of character, and bullying merely strengthened his determination.

"She may be your daughter," he said, "or she may not. And the young man along with her may be the son of the Lord-Lieutenant or the King of England himself. But I caught them in the act, and I'll not let them go."

"What the devil are you talking about?" said Sir Amos. "What act?"

"Landing guns, which is contrary to the proclamation," said the sergeant. "That's what they were doing."

Lady Coppinger gave a loud wail, and fell on her knees before the sergeant.

"For the love of God," she said. "Don't be too hard on the girl. She's young so she is, and it's little sense the best of them have at that age. Don't you know that anybody might do the like if they were young enough? You might have done it yourself, sergeant, before you were twenty."

"Keep quiet, Biddy," said Sir Amos. "Get up off your knees, and stop howling."

But Lady Coppinger was not to be stopped. She was pleading for her daughter's liberty, perhaps for her life.

"If she did what you say," she said, "she meant no harm by it; nor she wouldn't have done it at

all only for being led away by bad company. She was as quiet and decent a girl as anyone ever seen until she took up with them that ought to know better than to be leading her wrong."

She scowled tearfully at Basil. She had never seen him before, but was quite ready to let him bear the whole blame for her daughter's lapse from virtue.

"Oh, do stop, mother," said Mary.

Then there were several minutes of confusion. Lady Coppinger continued her appeal with tears and gesticulations. Basil called on Royce to interfere. Sir Amos cursed the sergeant and the constables with bitter fury. Royce tried to speak, but he was ineffective because he was chiefly occupied in an effort to get the gun and the revolvers away from Sir Amos. He failed to make himself heard. The constable who knew Lishreen made explanations to the sergeant, volubly in a low tone. A more clear-headed man than Sergeant Cussen might have been confused by the babel of sounds. One impression only remained on his mind. Mary Coppinger was certainly guilty of trying to smuggle arms into Ireland. She might be the daughter of a baronet—he could scarcely disregard the assurances of his own constable on that point—but that did not set her above suspicion. The daughters of men much more highly placed than baronets had been engaged in this same business of gun-running. Lady Coppinger's apologies strengthened his conviction. A mother does not apologize for a daughter's crime unless she is pretty sure that the girl has committed it. And a mother knows, or ought to know, what her daughter has been doing.

By a firm assertion of his official position and by straining to the utmost the powers of a naturally fine voice, Sergeant Cussen made himself heard above the tumult.

"Whatever the prisoners have to say for themselves," he said, "can be said when they're tried, and I may tell you that this will be a matter for a Court Martial."

Royce succeeded at last in getting Sir Amos's weapons out of the old man's reach. Relieved of the fear of a horrible slaughter, following the discharge of both barrels of the shotgun, he was able to give his whole attention to the Sergeant.

"Look here," he said. "You know me. You know that I'm a lawyer and a respectable man."

"You have the name of it," said the sergeant, unwillingly.

"I give you my word," said Royce, "that these two young people weren't landing arms of any sort for anyone. Will that satisfy you?"

"It will not," said the sergeant, "not without you tell me what they were doing."

"I can't tell you that," said Royce.

"Maybe," said the sergeant, "you'll be expecting me to believe that the young woman was down at the tower taking a photograph of her great-grandmother."

It was thus, confusedly, that he had understood Mary's statement about the portrait.

"I'm not asking you to believe any such fool thing," said Royce.

"That's what the young woman told me, anyhow," said the sergeant.

Sir Amos was beginning to curse again. Lady Coppinger, who had been sobbing quietly, was evidently on the verge of another strong supplication. Royce saw that he must act decisively if Mary and Basil were to be saved from imprisonment. He stepped forward and took the sergeant by the arm.

"Come here for a minute," he said. "I want to speak to you privately."

The sergeant looked suspicious. He was inclined to think that Royce was trying to distract his attention while either Basil or Mary, or both of them together, escaped. He was averse to following Royce into the recess of the bow window. But Royce was a man very difficult to resist. He led the sergeant gently away from his prisoners. The sergeant looked round and gave an order to his constables.

"Let you take care now," he said, "for if you don't, they'll be getting away on you."

Then he allowed himself to be led into the window.

"That's a nice-looking girl, sergeant," said Royce. "Take a good look at her and tell me, don't you think she's as nice a looking girl as ever you saw?"

The sergeant looked back at Mary. Standing in the light of the lamp, with her oilskin coat unbuttoned and the yellow oilskin cap pushed back from her forehead, she looked dishevelled and storm-tossed. But there was no denying that she was a singularly pretty girl.

"I've seen plainer-headed ones before now," said the sergeant grudgingly.

He did not understand what Royce was at, but he feared that an appeal to his pity was going to be made. He was determined to resist that, no matter how good-looking the girl might be.

"And the young man's not bad-looking either," said Royce.

The sergeant took a good look at Basil.

"He's a well-set-up boy enough," he said. "But sure plenty of them is that. And plenty of girls, too, that's up to any kind of mischief in spite of their pretty faces."

He meant—and he was perfectly right—that physical beauty is no proof of innocence. He was quite prepared to defend his opinion and to produce instances of beautiful ladies whose politics were of a most reprehensible kind. The development of Royce's argument rather astonished him.

"Come now, sergeant," said Royce, "did you never hear of a young man taking a pretty girl out in the evening and choosing a lonely bit of road for his walk?"

"I have heard of the like," said the sergeant.

A faint flicker of a smile softened his mouth as he spoke. Royce felt that he was gaining ground.

"I dare say you've done as much yourself," said Royce.

"I'm a married man," said the sergeant, "and I've five children."

"I thought as much," said Royce, "from the general well-fed look of you and the sensible way you've been talking this evening, I knew you must be a married man. And five children are no more than I'd expect of you. Every one ought to have at least five children. Now tell me this. You're not on your oath, and of course you needn't answer unless you like, but before you were married—when you were courting the present Mrs. Cussen——"

"Julia Keogh was her name at that time," said the sergeant.

"A remarkably nice name," said Royce. "I don't wonder it attracted you. But what I wanted to ask you was this: Did you ever, in the course of your courtship, take Julia Keogh out for a walk with you?"

"I did, of course," said the sergeant. "Sure, everybody does that."

"And perhaps—remember, you needn't answer unless you like—perhaps you managed to give her a kiss occasionally."

The sergeant grinned.

"But I need scarcely ask you that," said Royce. "Miss Keogh would hardly have married you afterwards if you hadn't. Now, supposing that a police-sergeant—you weren't a sergeant yourself in those days, were you?"

"I was not."

"Well, supposing that a sergeant or one of your District Inspectors had come up suddenly and arrested you just as you were slipping your arm around Miss Keogh's waist? What would you have said to him?"

"I'd have told him the truth," said the sergeant.

"You would not. No decent man would. And if you had Miss Keogh would never have forgiven you. No girl would forgive a man who told a perfect stranger about every kiss she'd given him. You know that as well as I do."

"I wouldn't say but you might be right there," said the sergeant.

"I am right," said Royce, "and you know it. What you'd have done would have been to stand

like a fool while Miss Keogh told the best lie she could think of at the moment, and that might have been anything. She might have said she was taking a photo of her great-grandmother."

The sergeant stared. He was not a very quick-witted man, but he was by no means a fool. Royce's meaning came to him slowly, and a smile stretched itself across his face.

"If that's the way of it with them two——" he said.

"It's exactly that way with them," said Royce, "and you've put your foot in it badly. You've dragged them back here and given the whole thing away to the poor girl's father. You wouldn't have liked it yourself if some one had gone to Miss Keogh's father——"

"Old Keogh was a terror," said the sergeant.

"Not worse than Sir Amos," said Royce. "You see yourself what his temper is like."

The sergeant had noticed Sir Amos's temper. It was still noticeable, for a continual growl of curses directed against the three constables was plainly audible.

"You've got her into serious trouble already," said Royce, "for I needn't tell you that Sir Amos didn't know anything about her slipping out to-night. But if you arrest her and the whole business comes out in Court it will be perfectly frightful."

"I wouldn't wish to be too hard on the young lady," said the sergeant, "nor on any girl that might be situated like what you say, and if the young gentleman will give his word——"

"Price," said Royce, "come here for a minute."

"I can't," said Basil. "Unless these two scallywags of policemen will let me go I can't stir."

The two constables looked inquiringly at the sergeant. He nodded to them and they released Basil.

"Price," said Royce, "I think I've made it all right with the sergeant; but he wants you to answer one question before he releases you and Miss Coppinger. You needn't hesitate to speak quite freely. The sergeant will regard anything you say as strictly confidential."

"I will," said the sergeant.

"Now," said Royce, "were you out walking with Miss Coppinger this evening?"

Considering that the sergeant had found them together in the old tower, the question seemed to Basil unnecessary. They could hardly have got there without walking.

"Of course I was," he said.

The answer, though plain and straightforward, did not seem to satisfy the sergeant. Royce noticed that he looked doubtful, and at once altered the form of his question.

"I should have said, were you walking out with her," said Royce, "not out walking with her. There's a difference."

Basil tried to think out the difference, but for the moment failed.

"Was you kissing her?" said the sergeant bluntly.

Basil, who was still young, blushed indignantly.

"Of course I wasn't," he said. "I have the greatest respect for Miss Coppinger, and I shouldn't dream of——"

"There, now, sergeant," said Royce soothingly.

"Isn't that exactly what I told you? Mr. Price is a thoroughly honourable man. You'd have said the same thing yourself if anybody had accused you of kissing Mrs. Cussen, while she was Miss Keogh, I mean. You wouldn't mind now, of course, even if half a dozen people saw you do it."

The sergeant grinned. Royce seized the chance of giving some good advice to Basil.

"That's what I'm always telling you, Price," he said. "Get married, and you won't mind these little things in the least."

"But," said Basil, "I wasn't—I didn't—I regard it as outrageous insolence in this policeman——"

"Oh, don't worry," said Royce. "The sergeant quite understands. Don't you, sergeant?"

"I do," said the sergeant, grinning knowingly at Basil.

"I'm so glad," said Royce. "And now you really are satisfied?"

The sergeant nodded.

"In that case," said Royce, "don't you think you'd better be getting home? And take those three young constables with you. I'm certain they ought to be in bed. Miss Mary," he said aloud, "the sergeant has withdrawn all the charges against you and against Mr. Price. There isn't a stain on your character, at least, not a stain of a political kind, and nothing else really matters in Ireland."

"Is he going to let us go?" said Mary.

The sergeant and his men had already reached the door of the room. Their departure was sufficient evidence of their good intentions, but Mary ran after them and took the sergeant by the arm.

"And you'll let old Mahony go too," she said.

"Sure, I haven't got Mahony," said the sergeant.

"Do let him go," said Mary. "He's just as innocent as we are."

The sergeant, who knew Mahony, found some difficulty in believing that the old man was innocent in precisely the way he thought Mary and Basil were. It was impossible to think of a man of sixty-five or seventy years of age wanting to kiss anyone in a damp ruin in the middle of the night.

"Don't I tell you," he said, "that I haven't got Mahony? I haven't seen sight or light of the old man for the best part of a week."

"If you haven't arrested him," said Mary, "where is he?"

"It might be his boat that I found below the tower this evening, but I didn't set eyes on the old man."

"Then Jimmy Rafferty's got him," said Mary.

"That may be, miss," said the sergeant, "but whether he has him or not, I haven't."

The sergeant and his men tramped out of the house. They made nearly as much noise with their boots going away as they had with the knocker when they wanted to get in.

"We'll give them ten minutes' start, Price," said Royce, "and then we'll get back to the hotel and go to bed. We ought all of us to be in bed. Lady Coppinger looks as if she was catching a cold standing there with nothing on her but a nightdress and an old shawl."

"I have it caught already," said Lady Coppinger, "and I wouldn't wonder if I got my death out of

it. Come along with me now, Mary, and get the wet clothes off you."

But Mary was not ready to go to bed. She had something to say first. Her mother protested in vain.

"You'll get your death of cold, so you will," she said, "and if the two of us is laid down together who is to look after your father? I don't know what's coming over young girls these times. Any-one would think you had traipsed about enough for one night."

"You go to bed, mother," said Mary. "I'll be after you as soon as I'm ready."

Lady Coppinger, who was really feeling the cold, shambled out of the room.

CHAPTER XX

“DON’T go, Charlie,” said Mary, “and don’t you go yet, Mr. Price. We must consult over what’s to be done about poor Mahony.”

“The police haven’t got him,” said Royce. “I’m inclined to believe the sergeant about that, for there’d be no particular point in his telling us a lie. And I must say I’m glad of it. If there was one thing Mahony dreaded more than another it was being mixed up with the police.”

“If the police haven’t got him,” said Mary, “then Rafferty has.”

“I don’t see,” said Royce, “that we need take that for granted.”

“Who else is there,” said Mary, “who would kidnap a man?”

“Mahony,” said Sir Amos, “must take his chance as well as the rest of us. If he’s kidnapped, he’s kidnapped, and there’s no more to be said about it.”

“But they’ll kill him,” said Mary. “If they haven’t killed him already they soon will. Rafferty would think nothing of killing him, and I can’t bear it. Old Mahony is the best friend I have in the world.”

Basil would have liked to dispute this statement. Mahony might be a friend of longer standing, but could not possibly be more attached to Mary than

he was. But the moment seemed unsuitable for a declaration of devotion. He contented himself by making an offer of help.

"I'm ready to do anything to save the old man," he said.

"You can't do anything," said Sir Amos. "If he's been fool enough to fall into Rafferty's hands he must take the consequences. There's nothing to be done."

"But perhaps," said Royce. "Rafferty hasn't got him at all. Let's hope for the best."

No one paid any attention to this suggestion. Mary was too excited and too indignant to listen to Royce. Sir Amos did not very much care where the old man was or what happened to him. Basil's whole attention was given to Mary.

"If we can't save him any other way," she said, "we must ransom him. Rafferty would take money to let him go, I'm sure."

"Rafferty would probably take a bribe all right," said Sir Amos, "or if he wouldn't, Cohen would. Cohen can't be thirsting for Mahony's blood, and I expect he'd let him go pretty cheap. The difficulty is I haven't got so much as five shillings to offer them, and I don't suppose either one or other of them would take my I.O.U. What do you think, Charlie?"

Royce shook his head. Sir Amos's credit, in his opinion, could not be regarded as an asset.

"I've some money," said Basil. "I haven't very much with me, but I think I could put down £10. I'd be very glad to let you have it if it's any use."

"If you like to spend it in bailing out Mahony," said Sir Amos, "I'm sure we'll all be greatly obliged to you. But I think you'll be a fool if you do."

Mary stamped her foot, and turned angrily on her father.

"We can't take Mr. Price's money to help old Mahony," she said. "It would be too mean."

"You certainly can't take mine," said Sir Amos, "for I haven't got any."

"You've got the picture," said Mary.

"Don't talk nonsense," said Sir Amos. "The picture's worth ten times as much as Mahony. Ireland's full of old men like that. You can pick them up along the roads in any parish. The loss of an odd one here or there won't matter to anyone. But the picture—I've reason to believe that picture's worth £1,000."

Sir Amos, it appeared, valued Mahony, with his affection and loyalty, at £100, a tenth of the sum he had fixed on as the probable price of the picture. Mary was more romantic, less materially minded than her father. She lost her temper abruptly and completely.

"That's an abominable thing to say," she said. "It's sordid, it's disgusting. How can you set a few pounds above a man's life?"

Sir Amos's face darkened. There was every sign that he, too, was losing his temper, but before he spoke Royce stepped forward.

"I think," he said, "that Price and I had better be saying good night. We've had a most exhausting day, and we'd really be the better of getting some sleep."

He took Basil firmly by the arm and drew him out of the room. Basil was most unwilling to go, but found himself unable to resist without an actual struggle. Once outside the door Royce spoke to him.

"It's far better for us to keep out of these family

quarrels," he said. "In another minute or two there'll be language flying about which it would be very awkward for us to be listening to."

"But," said Basil, "we oughtn't to leave Miss Coppinger at his mercy."

"Oh, Miss Mary's very well able to take care of herself. If you ask me I should say that she'll give every bit as much as she gets."

"She's in the right," said Basil. "The way Sir Amos spoke about Mahony was disgraceful."

"You'll probably find out in the end that Mahony's all right," said Royce, "and anyway we couldn't stay listening to that wrangle. It wouldn't have been fair. The girl wouldn't like you to hear the names her father calls her, and she'd be horribly ashamed afterwards if she thought you'd heard the names she'll call her father."

Basil realized that Royce was right. Strangers ought not to mix themselves up in family quarrels. If Sir Amos, as seemed likely, swore at Mary, and if Mary were betrayed into abusing her father, it was far better for them to get through the scene without witnesses.

He followed Royce out of the house, across the grass-grown gravel sweep, and along the avenue. But they had not gone a hundred yards before they heard Mary Coppinger calling after them. They turned to go back, but she came running and met them before they reached the house. The interview with her father may have been stormy. It was certainly short.

"Now, Miss Mary," said Royce, "what do you want with me? If it's a subscription towards a

ransom for Mahony, I'll give you 10s. with pleasure."

"I don't want anything at all with you, Charlie," she said. "I want to speak to Mr. Price. You can go on a bit along the avenue and wait for him. But mind now, you must go a good way on. I can't have you listening to what I'm going to say. It's quite private."

"I wish Sergeant Cussen was here," said Royce. "If he was he'd be perfectly sure that I told him the truth."

Mary was puzzled. She saw no connexion whatever between Sergeant Cussen and her conversation with Basil.

"What on earth has he got to do with it?" she said.

Basil, of course, understood what Royce meant. He was greatly annoyed and most anxious to prevent any further talk of the kind.

"Oh, do go away, Royce," he said, "and stop talking in that damned vulgar way."

Neither he nor Mary could see Royce's face as he walked off in the darkness. This was perhaps fortunate. His smiling mouth and half-closed eyes expressed very clearly what Basil called damned vulgarity.

"Mr. Price," said Mary, "I want you to do something for me. Will you?"

"I will," said Basil. "I'll do anything—anything at all you ask me."

He spoke fervently, leaving no doubt that he meant what he said. Mary felt that she owed him some sort of apology for extracting such a promise from him.

"You're the only person I can ask," she said.

"Charlie wouldn't do it, I know. He'd say he was acting for dad's creditors if I asked him."

"He always says that," said Basil, "but I don't believe he means it."

"Anyhow, I couldn't ask him, for he'd only refuse. And I can't ask father. When you hear what it is that I want you to do you'll see that I couldn't possibly ask father."

"There's no need to ask anyone but me," said Basil. "I'll do it."

He spoke tenderly, lovingly; letting his feelings express themselves in his tone. But Mary seemed quite unconscious of anything beyond the promise he had made.

"I want you," she said, "to go to Cohen, and offer to give him the picture if he'll let Mahony go."

Basil was startled out of his sentimental mood. It was no wonder she had been afraid to ask Royce. It was no wonder she dare not mention her plan to her father.

"But—" he said, "but *can* you give him the picture?"

"Of course I can," she said. "Now that it's cut out of its frame I've nothing to do but tuck it under my arm and walk off with it any time I choose."

That was not exactly an answer to the question Basil meant to ask. He had no doubt about her ability to carry the roll of canvas.

"But your father," he said. "He won't agree to that, will he?"

"He won't be asked to."

"But it's his picture," said Basil. "Ought you to——?"

"I don't care what dad says or does," said Mary. "I don't care whose the picture is. I'm not going to let old Mahony be murdered if I can do anything to save him. He's my friend. He's always loved me ever since I was a little girl. And I love him. I don't care about anything so long as I save him. If those men want the picture, they can have it on condition they let Mahony go."

Basil stood silent. She was claiming nearly as much from him as Herodias's daughter did when her father made his rash promise. Mary understood that he was hesitating.

"Of course," she said coldly, "if you don't want to do it you needn't. I won't say another word. Only you did promise and I thought I could trust you."

That was too much for Basil.

"I'll do it," he said. "I'll keep my promise. I'll see Cohen to-morrow morning, and if he agrees I'll take the picture to him."

"Thanks awfully," she said. "I knew you'd do it in the end."

She spoke sincerely. There was no doubt about her gratitude. But Basil felt he was entitled to a little more than gratitude. It seemed to him that he was sacrificing his honour to her. He was perhaps making himself liable to a term of imprisonment for theft; a mere "Thanks awfully," however heartily spoken, was an inadequate reward.

"I'll do it for your sake," he said. "I wouldn't do it for anyone else in the world except for you."

Once more Mary seemed quite unconscious of the fervour of his tone.

"Don't say a word to Charlie," she said. "It would never do for him to know."

She held out her hand as if to bid him farewell. Basil felt that a golden opportunity was slipping away from him. She was there. He was standing in the darkness of the night within a few inches of the girl he loved. He had proved—by a promise most difficult to make—his devotion to her. Yet he found it amazingly hard to find anything to say to her. She was so absorbed in the fate of an old fisherman that she seemed unconscious that her companion was her lover.

"May I—" he said at last, "may I call you Mary?"

It was feeble, banal. It might have been a quotation from a penny novelette. It deserved laughter or scorn. Basil was conscious of all that. Mary seemed conscious of nothing at all.

"Of course you may if you like," she said. "Nearly everybody does. It's far shorter than Miss Copping." "

Then she turned and left him.

He went on, and found Royce waiting for him a quarter of a mile along the avenue.

"I hope I kept far enough away," said Royce. "If Sergeant Cussen had been with us just now he wouldn't have needed to cross-examine you about what you were doing in the old tower."

When Royce got hold of what he considered a good joke he hated to let it go. It was his habit to repeat it—as a cook serves a large joint, in various forms, until even the last bones of it are boiled down for soup.

CHAPTER XXI

BASIL slept uneasily that night. He woke finally and hopelessly while it was still quite dark. He struck a match and looked at his watch. It was a few minutes after four o'clock.

Those who wake at that hour, even if they have no real troubles to worry them, suffer miserably from a recollection of their follies in the past and from gloomy anticipations of their fate in the future. Basil had troubles and difficulties which were genuine enough. He tossed to and fro in his bed, turning from one side to another, becoming physically uncomfortable while he suffered mental torture.

He was fully determined to keep the promise he had made and to secure old Mahony's release if he possibly could. But the more he thought about it the less he liked the idea of bartering away the picture. He foresaw that Sir Amos would be furiously angry, and he knew that by no possibility could he defend his own action. He feared the consequences for Mary even more than for himself. She would certainly suffer under the lashing of her father's tongue. He thought with sickening horror that the fierce old man might attack her with worse than violent words. Moreover, he knew more than Sir Amos, Mary, or Royce about the real value of the

picture. If it were—and Sir Amos seemed certain about this—a genuine Gainsborough, it was worth—he did not know exactly how much, but a very large sum. His long association with Lord Edmund had taught him to respect the market value of the works of the great English portrait painters. He foresaw that the history of the buying and selling of such a picture would be a matter of public interest. He did not like the thought of the inevitable newspaper comments on his share in the business.

Yet behind all his fears and anticipations of trouble lay the promise he had made to Mary. That he intended to fulfil at any cost to himself. Only—as he lay writhing this one hopeful thought came to him—it might be possible to fulfil the promise at a lower cost than the sacrifice of the picture. Cohen, or whoever held Mahony captive, might accept a smaller ransom paid in cash. Basil had not much money, but he was prepared to offer all he had for Mahony's freedom, even sell his personal possessions before bartering the picture.

Once this thought occurred to him he became eager to go to Cohen and begin his bargaining. He looked at his watch again, and found it was five o'clock. Cohen would certainly not be awake at that hour, and Basil did not see what excuse he could make for rousing him. He decided that seven o'clock was the very earliest hour at which he could, with any decency, go to Cohen. The time passed miserably slowly. Basil had almost reached the end of his patience at six o'clock. He got up and began to dress. He tried to spend as much time as he could over the business; but in spite of himself he must

have hurried. At half-past six he was fully dressed.

He opened his door and looked out, along the narrow passage, up and down the stairs. There was no one about. No one in the hotel seemed to be awake. Even Mick, whose business it was to clean the boots of the guests, had not begun his day's work and was neither to be seen nor heard. But Basil felt that he could wait no longer.

He did not know where Cohen's room was. But the "Lishreen Hotel" is not very large, and he felt sure that he would be able to find it. He passed Royce's door softly, stepping as noiselessly as he could. He was most unwilling to wake his friend, for he knew that Royce would certainly want to take a hand in the bargaining with Cohen. He knocked at the next door, and went in to find the room empty. He had no better luck with the only other door on the floor on which he slept. He went upstairs. There he found four more rooms, and outside two of them were boots ready to be taken away and cleaned. Basil looked at them and remembered that Cohen was a taller man than Kaitcer. It seemed likely that he would have bigger feet. He chose the room which had the larger boots outside it. He had reasoned rightly. When he opened the door he saw Cohen, in bed, lying flat on his back, snoring loudly.

The man might be bent on a robbery, might be in league with bandits and murderers, might be a criminal of every known kind, but he certainly was not troubled by his conscience. He slept so soundly that Basil had the greatest difficulty in awakening him. Speaking was no use. Coughing loudly and stamping about the floor did not affect Cohen in the

least. It was only after Basil had shaken him that he opened his eyes and blinked.

"Are you awake?" said Basil. "Are you thoroughly awake? I want to talk to you."

Cohen sat up and yawned.

"I'm always awake enough to talk business," he said, "and I suppose you haven't come to my bedroom at this hour just to inquire for my health."

The room was dark and very stuffy. Basil pulled up the blind and opened the window. He felt he could get on better with a little light and air. Cohen shivered and gathered the bedclothes round his shoulders. He sat huddled up, holding the blankets tight. With his long hooked nose and his shining black hair he looked like a crow perched on the branch of a tree on a frosty day.

"Mine is a business proposition right enough," said Basil. "I've come to offer you £5 if you'll let old Mahony go."

Cohen looked at him narrowly for a minute.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

"Oh, yes, you do," said Basil. "I'm talking about £5, and I'm talking about old Mahony. Come now, you can't want to keep the old man. He's no kind of use to you, and £5 is a nice little sum."

"I haven't got old Mahony," said Cohen.

"I never supposed you had him shut up in your wardrobe," said Basil. "But you know where he is. Your friend Rafferty has him hidden away somewhere, and we want him set at liberty. Look here. I'll say £10. That's a good offer. It's found money for you; and if you keep Mahony there's sure to be trouble sooner or later."

Cohen shook his head.

"Twenty pounds," said Basil.

"I'm catching cold," said Cohen, "sitting here with the window open. I wish you'd go away unless you've something sensible to say to me."

Basil raised his bid £5 at a time till he got to £100. Cohen still shook his head. Basil began to lose his temper with him.

"You think," he said, "that because you are in Ireland and happen to have made friends with that ruffian Rafferty you can kidnap anyone you like and nothing will ever be said or done to you. But you'll find that you've made a mistake this time. I'll raise hell when I go home and I'll make the country too hot to hold you unless you let Mahony go."

"You may raise any hell you like," said Cohen, "but I can't let Mahony go when I haven't got him. Neither Kaitcer nor I nor Rafferty have touched the man. I hope that will satisfy you."

It did not satisfy Basil in the least, but it showed him that there was no use in losing his temper. He began to bargain again, this time raising his bids by £10 at a time. He reached £200, and became aware by the look in his eyes that Cohen's cupidity was aroused.

He jumped up to £300. While he uttered the words he felt, with a cold shock, that he could not possibly pay £300 even if he sold everything he possessed down to the clothes he was wearing. It was almost a relief to him when Cohen shook his head again.

"I tell you I can't do it. I'd give you any old man in the world for £300, if I had one to give. But

I don't even know this Mahony that you're talking about."

"Rafferty does though," said Basil, "and what's more, Rafferty knows where he is."

"Rafferty doesn't," said Cohen. "What is the use of arguing about it? Do you suppose I'm such a fool as to refuse good money like that if I could possibly earn it?"

"If you make inquiries," said Basil, "you'll find that Rafferty has him right enough. Just you give the word and the old man will be released at once. Come, now £250 is a big lump of money for an old fellow who's no use to you, alive or dead."

"You said three hundred," said Cohen.

This convinced Basil—though he had little doubt before—that Cohen knew where Mahony was and could release him if he chose. He repeated his impossible offer of £300, but Cohen, with evident reluctance, refused it.

"I know nothing about your man," he said. "I keep telling you that and you will not believe me."

"I won't believe you," said Basil, "because I'm sure that you or Rafferty or some of his gang kidnapped the old man last night at about ten o'clock between Lishreen House and the old tower at the end of the point."

"I was not there," said Cohen, "not at that hour. Nor was Rafferty, nor Kaitcer. We were there earlier. I admit it. But we all went away. If you want to know the truth, we went away because you sent the police to watch us. Oh, we know very well about the police, and we did not stay to meet them. We knew that you would not move the picture

while the police were watching, so what was the use of our staying? If anyone captured your old man it was the police."

But Basil knew that the police had not arrested Mahony. He was still sure that Cohen was lying to him, holding out for a larger bribe. He became desperate. The idea of asking Royce to stand in with him and put down another £100 or £150 occurred to him. But he remembered that Royce had offered to subscribe 10s. to a ransom fund the night before, and it seemed absurd to ask him for any sum likely to tempt Cohen. Besides, he had promised Mary not to talk to Royce about the business. He thought of telegraphing to Lord Edmund Troyte for £200, but he put that idea out of his head at once. Lord Edmund would certainly want to know how the money was to be spent, and Basil realized that he could not satisfy him. He could offer no more money himself for he had no more to offer, and he knew that Cohen would insist on payment. He was forced to offer the picture itself, though he foresaw that all sorts of trouble would wait for him and Mary when their side of the bargain came to be fulfilled. He had no doubt that Cohen would accept this offer at once. In his eyes, as in those of Sir Amos, a Gainsborough portrait was worth a whole regiment of old Mahonys. To his surprise Cohen hesitated, stared at him, stuttered, finally burst into tears, actually sobbed and cried like a disappointed child. Basil stood and looked at him in blank astonishment. Cohen, sitting up in bed and blubbering, was a sufficiently ridiculous sight, but Basil did not laugh at him. He was too puzzled to laugh at anything.

At last enlightenment came to him. Cohen sobbed out some broken sentences.

"The picture—you would give it—and I cannot take it—I cannot accept. I have not got your old man. I tell you—I tell you again that I do not know anything about him."

Basil was convinced at last. Cohen was neither lying nor bluffing. His distress was too plainly genuine to be mistaken.

"If you haven't got him," said Basil, "where is he? He disappeared last night."

Cohen stopped crying and jumped out of bed.

"I shall find him," he said. "If he is the price of the picture I shall find him for you. If I have to turn over every stone in this accursed country I shall do it. I shall go on turning the stones day and night until I find him. Then you shall give me the picture."

He plunged across the room towards the wash-hand stand as if he meant to begin by turning it over in his search for Mahony. Then, with his hand on the jug, he stopped abruptly, and looked round at Basil. His violent emotion seemed to have vanished. There was a look of cunning in his eyes.

"Will you put it in writing," he said, "that you agree to hand me the picture when I find Mahony for you?"

Basil might have said yes or no to this amazingly business-like request. He never knew what he would have answered, because before he had time to think or speak he heard his name called loudly.

"Price, Price, where are you, Price?"

It was Royce who called. Basil went to the door of Cohen's room and shouted back.

"All right. Wait a minute, and I'll be with you."

"It is Royce," said Cohen, "but it will not be necessary, will it, to tell him of our little arrangement? That is between you and me strictly. I find Mahony and you give me the picture. There is no need for any formal agreement, no need for writing at all. I can trust your word."

Basil left the room and ran downstairs.

CHAPTER XXII

“**W**HERE the devil have you been ? ” said Royce. “ Mick and I have been searching the world for you. You weren’t in your room. You weren’t anywhere downstairs. Mick said he was sure you hadn’t gone out because the door was locked on the inside when he went to open it.”

“ I was in Cohen’s bedroom,” said Basil.

“ Rather a disgusting place to spend the morning,” said Royce. “ Why did you do it ? Were you bargaining with him to let old Mahony go ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, you needn’t go on, Mahony’s here wanting to see you. That’s why we were all looking for you.”

“ Mahony’s here ? ”

“ Yes. I told you last night, and I told Mary, that he was not kidnapped by Rafferty or anyone else. Mahony’s not a fool, and he’s quite well able to look after himself.”

“ Where is he ? ” said Basil.

“ He’s in the motor-house, hiding behind my car. He slipped in there early this morning, and whistled to attract Mick’s attention when he saw him crossing the yard. He’s lying low and doesn’t want

to show up in any way because he has an idea that the police are after him."

"But they're not, are they?"

"No, they're not. At least, I don't think they are. But you never know in this country who the police are after. Mahony appears to have got the fright of his life last night when he saw the sergeant and those constables prowling about the grounds of Lishreen House. He ran away at once, and spent the night in an old lime-kiln."

"But the police don't want to arrest him."

"I don't know whether they do or not," said Royce. "I'll ask Mick if you like. Hullo," he called. "Mick, Mick. Come here."

"But what can Mick possibly know about the matter?"

"Mick knows all about everything," said Royce, "and he's particularly well up in the doings and intentions of the police, because his sister is married to one of the constables who arrested you yesterday."

Mick, emerging from the kitchen, joined them in the hall where they stood together.

"Mick," said Royce, "are the police out after old Mahony?"

"They are not," said Mick. "I told him that first thing when I saw him this morning, but he wouldn't believe me. 'Mahony,' says I, 'you need have no dread in your mind. I'm just after running round,' says I, 'to pass the time of day with my sister Maggie, and she says to me——'"

"There, now," said Royce, "that's what I told you, Price. Maggie is the sister who's married to a constable."

"She says to me," Mick went on, "'Did you hear the news, Mick? The sergeant has took old Mahony's boat from him,' says she. 'And I suppose,' says, I, 'they'll be taking old Mahony himself next.' 'They will not,' says she, 'for they don't want him.' 'Are you sure of that?' says I. 'I am,' says she, 'and what's more, they'll give back the boat any time he wants it, for it's no use to them.' That's what she told me, and that's what I told old Mahony; but it didn't satisfy him. The way it is with that old man," Mick went on confidentially, "is that he never did like the police."

"If he wants to speak to me," said Basil, "I'd better go to him."

"It would be as well if you did," said Mick, "for he has a message for you, and he won't tell it to anyone only yourself. Not that he'd mind Mr. Royce hearing it. He has a respect for Mr. Royce, the same as every one else."

"Come along, then, and let's hear what he has to say. Who's the message from, Mick?"

"He didn't say," said Mick, "but it's my opinion it's from Miss Mary up at Lishreen House."

"Tell them to get our breakfast ready for us," said Royce. "We won't be long."

They found old Mahony sitting quietly on a hamper behind Royce's car.

"I'm sorry to be troubling your honour," he said to Basil, "and to be getting you up out of your bed before you wanted to rise. It's what I wouldn't do to any gentleman if it was only concerning myself I wanted to see you. But it was Miss Mary sent me to you. She says she'd be glad if you'd get a boat

somewhere this morning and sail round to the pool under the old tower, for she wants to meet you there at half-past ten."

"What for?" said Royce.

"It doesn't matter what for," said Basil. "Tell her I'll do it, of course."

"There's no need to be telling her that," said Mahony. "She knows well enough you'll do it. She knows you'd do more than that for her."

"All the same," said Royce, "it would be interesting to know what she wants him there for. Is it to take anything out to Inishraher, Mahony?"

"It might be," said Mahony.

"A picture, for instance?"

"I wouldn't say," said Mahony, "but it might be a picture."

"Does Sir Amos know anything about it?" said Royce.

"He does surely. Wasn't he there when Miss Mary was talking about it. It was him said that half-past ten would be soon enough, and that you needn't be starting any earlier."

"What does all that matter?" said Basil impatiently. "Of course I'll be there if she wants me, whatever it's for. The only question is, where am I to get a boat?"

He looked to Royce for an answer, but it was old Mahony who spoke.

"From what Mick's after telling me," he said, "the police will let you have my boat if you ask for it. They took it last night, but seemingly they don't want to keep it. It's in the harbour this minute, and there's nothing to hinder you getting into

it and sailing off as soon as you have your breakfast ate."

"I suppose you're going too," said Royce.

"I am not," said Mahony.

"But how is Mr. Price to find his way about the bay? You know perfectly well, Mahony, that a stranger can't go sailing here without somebody along with him to show him the rocks."

"He'll have Miss Mary along with him."

"But he's got to get the boat round to the old tower first," said Royce.

"He'll do that easy enough. Listen to me now, Mr. Price. When you get out beyond the end of the quay you'll see a red perch. Leave that on your port hand and stand on till you come to a black buoy. You can go as near as you like to the buoy, but you'll put about before you pass it. With the way the wind is this morning you'll be able to lie up to the old tower when you go about at the buoy. There isn't a rock nor a bank nor nothing else to stop you if you hold to your course. The ebb of the tide will be pushing up towards the tower all the time. When you're near it you can take the sails off the boat and row into the pool. It'll be safer for you to do that than to be trying to sail in, for there's tricky rocks at the entrance of that same pool."

"Why won't you go with him yourself, Mahony?" said Royce.

"I'm not going," said Mahony. "I told you all along I'd take no part in the business if the police was to be in it, and you've brought in the police in spite of me."

"We did no such thing," said Royce. "We've been trying our best all along to keep the police out of it."

"They're in it then, in spite of your trying. I seen them myself, four of them, walking along in the dark of the night up at Lishreen House. I seen them, I tell you, so where's the use of pretending they weren't there. It took me all I could do to keep away from them."

"They wouldn't have touched you," said Royce.

"They would. Didn't they take the young gentleman there? Didn't they take Miss Mary? And if they'd take the likes of them, what do you think they'd do to me?"

Royce was obliged to admit that they would probably have arrested old Mahony if he had not managed to keep out of their way.

"I went up to Lishreen House this morning," said Mahony, "and I told Miss Mary I'd have nothing more to do with it now she had the police to help her. What's more, I said the same to the old master."

"I don't suppose he was very pleased with you," said Royce.

"He was content enough then," said Mahony. "All he said was would I give a message to the young gentleman here. 'We can do without you, Mahony,' says he, 'if you'll give that message, and I'm obliged to you for all you've done.'"

"You can't expect me to believe that's all Sir Amos said to you," said Royce. "I know him, and he isn't exactly the gentle, long-suffering kind of turtle dove who'd coo at a man that went back

on him in the middle of an important affair. He trusted you, Mahony, and just because you have an absurd prejudice against the police you've deserted Sir Amos at the critical moment. That's the fact, however you try to disguise it, and Sir Amos isn't the man to let you down easy."

"What I told you," said Mahony, "is what the old master said to me."

He looked Royce full in the face with wide, unblinking eyes.

"I don't believe it," said Royce. "I've seen Sir Amos get into a cursing rage over far less than that, and I don't believe——"

There he stopped. It is difficult to avoid looking at a man who fixes you with a steady stare. Royce looked at Mahony. The old man's face was entirely devoid of expression. His eyes were as empty of meaning as the eyes of a dead codfish, but Royce stopped speaking suddenly.

"Oh," he said at last. "Oh."

He drew out the second "Oh" into a long significant note of interrogation.

"What does it matter about Sir Amos, or Mahony either?" said Basil. "Let's go in and get breakfast. I've little enough time before I start if I'm to be at the ruined tower before half-past ten." They went together into the hotel.

"I wish I knew," said Royce, "what Sir Amos was up to now. He's as full of tricks and turns as a hunted fox, and I can see well enough that he has some game or other on."

CHAPTER XXIII

“**I** THINK,” said Basil, as they sat at breakfast, “that I ought to send a message to Mary—I mean Miss Coppinger.”

“Oh, call her Mary if you like,” said Royce. “I shan’t tell. It’s quite time you got on friendly terms with her. But what on earth do you want to send her a message for? You’ll have the whole day with nothing on earth to do but talk to her.”

“I thought perhaps,” said Basil, “that I ought to let her know that I’ll be at the old tower to meet her. I shouldn’t like her to be uncertain whether I was going or not.”

“Unless she’s utterly different from any girl I’ve ever heard of,” said Royce, “she won’t be the least uncertain. She’ll know perfectly well you’ll be there, unless you’re dead.”

“Still, I think I’d like—— If I write her a short note will you run up in your car and leave it for her? I’ll be tremendously obliged if you will.”

“Well, I won’t,” said Royce, “I’m quite deep enough in an uncommonly fishy business already. And, anyway, I don’t care for lugging love letters about the country for you. I know the sort of letter you’d write, pages and pages of stuff which you might just as well say. In fact, she’d much rather

you said it than wrote it. Any girl would rather have that kind of thing—well, let us say emphasized with appropriate gesture.”

“All I want to write,” said Basil, “is a short note, three lines, not what you mean at all. But if you won’t take it, you won’t. I wonder if Mick would do it for me. Has he got a bicycle?”

“If he hasn’t he can easily borrow one. And Mick would do anything short of killing a man for 5s. I don’t suppose he would hesitate much about murder if you offered him 10s.”

“I’ll give him ten with pleasure,” said Basil.

“Don’t,” said Royce. “Mick is an honest sort of man, and if you give him 10s. he might feel that he ought to earn it. It would add frightfully to the complication of this affair if either Cohen or Kaitcer were found lying about with his throat cut.”

He rose from the table as he spoke.

“I’ll settle with Mick,” he went on, “while you write your note. And don’t make it too long. I know it’s a strong temptation, but don’t do it. Things of that sort are really easier said than written. Once make a start and she’ll help you out. All really nice girls do that.”

Basil sat down to write his note while Royce searched for Mick. He took the advice he had been given, and made it short, very short indeed. It was finished long before Royce came back. Basil waited impatiently for five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour. At last Royce came into the room.

“You may tear up that note of yours,” he said. “It can’t be sent up to Lishreen House. Mick’s gone.”

"Gone? What for?"

"That's just what I've been trying to find out," said Royce. "He has no earthly business to walk off out of the hotel at this hour when he ought to be waiting about to see if we want him to do anything. I asked the cook, who's a decent sort of young woman, and she said she thought Mahony had sent him off on a message."

"But would he?" said Basil. "What would he want to send him for?"

"That's just what I was asking myself," said Royce, "and asking the cook, who didn't know, when Jimmy Rafferty's niece came into the kitchen with a chicken she wanted to sell. I asked her if she'd met Mick anywhere along the road. She's a simple-minded great slob of a good-natured girl without much sense. So instead of lying she told me straight out that Mick was in her uncle's house."

"In Jimmy Rafferty's?" said Basil.

"Exactly. Now that's queer, isn't it? The cook, who's by no means a fool, was whishing at the girl to make her stop talking and making ferocious faces at her when she thought I wasn't looking. Well, I thought it was queer the minute the girl told me, but I thought it queerer still when I saw the cook tying her face up into knots, so I asked the girl straight out what Mick was doing there, relying on her being fool enough to tell me in spite of the cook. But all I got out of her was that he was passing the time of day with her uncle. She didn't listen to what they said, so she couldn't tell me any more. Mighty odd, isn't it?"

"It is odd," said Basil, "but I don't see that

it matters. Mick doesn't know anything, so he can't tell anything."

"I've told you a dozen times that Mick knows everything. For instance, he knows perfectly well that you're going to meet Mary Coppinger with the boat at half-past ten. He can't help knowing that, and I'll bet you what you like he knows what you're going to meet her for. How would you like it now if he told Jimmy Rafferty that you and Mary Coppinger were taking the picture out to Inishraher to-day?"

Basil jumped to his feet.

"I'd better start at once," he said. "Every minute I delay makes it more dangerous."

"Sit down and finish your breakfast," said Royce. "In the first place there's no use your being at the old tower before ten-thirty. Mahony distinctly told you that she wouldn't be there till ten, and you can't go without her. In the second place I don't believe Mick would give you away like that. He's a decent sort of fellow and he has no particular liking for Jimmy Rafferty."

"But if he didn't tell him that what did he tell him?" said Basil.

"There you have me," said Royce. "I'm blest if I know what he wanted to go to Rafferty for at all. And I couldn't get another word out of that girl, though I did my best. Fancy any girl being so stupid as not to listen to what two men were saying when she was in the room with them. You'd hardly believe that possible, would you? But what's the good of talking? If she'd been intelligent enough to listen, she'd have been too intelligent to tell me

what she heard. You can't have it both ways ; but I'm bound to say I'd have more satisfaction in dealing with a clever one who lied than a great cow of a creature like that one who hasn't brains enough to do anything but speak the truth."

At nine o'clock Basil and Royce walked down to the harbour together. Mahony's boat was there, moored to the side of the quay. A constable, standing at a little distance, seemed to be on guard over her. But he made no objection to Basil's taking her. She was a strongly built boat, about twenty feet long, broad in the beam, with a short mast and no bowsprit—a kind of boat common enough in the West of Ireland, and well suited to face the seas on that exposed coast.

A little further along the quay lay a larger boat, half-decked, evidently much more heavily canvassed. Basil looked at her a little enviously. There was a strong breeze blowing. He knew that there must be a good deal of sea running in the bay outside. His voyage could have been made much more comfortably and dryly, perhaps more safely, in the bigger, half-decked boat. It could also have been made much more quickly. Mahony's boat was sturdy and strong, but she certainly looked slow.

"It's a pity," said Royce, "it's a very great pity that I have my professional reputation to keep up. It would have been rather fun to go with you. But I'll help you to get the sails on the boat, anyhow, even if I can do nothing else."

He and Basil sat down on the edge of the quay and dropped into the boat which lay below them. The policeman who had brought her round from the

old tower the night before had been very careless in stowing the sails. The ropes lay under and round the boom, the gaff and the thwarts in a nasty tangle. It was some time before Basil succeeded in clearing the throat and peak halyards and getting the main sheet coiled down. Royce worked at the foresail, which had twisted itself up and tied itself into complicated knots with its own sheets and halyard.

"I've half a mind to risk it and go with you," said Royce.

It was evident that he was having a struggle with himself. A desire for the adventure was strong in him, but he was very nervous about the consequences.

"But I dare say," he went on, "that you don't want me. Under the circumstances I can quite understand that you wouldn't want me. Two's company, you know, and three's——"

Basil was leaning over the stern of the boat, shipping the rudder. He heard what Royce said, but, luckily, did not see the expression of his face. Royce had thrown a good deal of meaning into his smile when he said that two was company. Basil was not quite sure whether he wanted Royce or not. A third person would spoil his day with Mary Coppinger; but—a strong gust swept down the harbour at the moment—an extra hand in the boat would certainly be desirable, and, in spite of Mahony's sailing directions, he was not very confident about the navigation of the bay.

"Come if you like," he said. "I'll be very glad to have you."

He hoisted the mainsail. It flapped violently, and

the boom banged from side to side of the boat. Its performance decided Royce.

"No," he said, "I won't go. I might risk my reputation, and I dare say you and Mary Coppinger would put up with me without swearing. But there's no fun in being sea-sick all day, and that's what would certainly happen to me. It always does."

He climbed out of the boat and stood on the edge of the quay, looking down. Basil hoisted the fore-sail. Royce cast off the mooring ropes, and Basil gathered them inboard.

"Good luck to you," said Royce.

Basil pushed the boat's head off the quay with an oar. The wind filled the sails. He shipped his oar and sprang aft to the tiller. The boat heeled over and gathered way. Royce waved his hand.

"Don't drown yourself," he shouted, "and take care of Mary."

Then he turned and walked back along the quay. He intended to get out his car at once and drive straight to Carnew. He had business waiting to be done, letters lying in his office to be answered, a round of dull duties to get through. His share in the adventures of the Gainsborough portrait was over. He sighed, and then congratulated himself that he had not been involved too deeply in the affair.

CHAPTER XXIV

BASIL sailed Mahony's boat safely into the little pool below the ruined tower. Mary Coppinger was standing on the rocks waiting for him and held the precious oilskin-covered roll in her hands. She stepped on board as soon as Basil laid the boat alongside of the shelving rock.

"I think," he said, "that we'd better tie down a reef before we start. It's blowing pretty hard."

"We've no time to waste on tying down reefs," said Mary. "You couldn't tell but somebody might start out after us. If Jimmy Rafferty comes he won't be tying down any reefs. He and Cohen and the others won't mind taking risks and getting wet. They really do want to get——"

She patted the oilskin roll and smiled cheerfully. The thought of possible pursuit did not seem to make her in the least anxious. But Basil, who had sailed the boat round from Lishreen, was still uneasy and wished to reef the sail.

"She has as much as she could stand up to coming here," he said, "and it'll certainly be worse outside. It won't take us long to tie down a reef."

But Mary would not agree. She took her seat at the tiller, laying the oilskin roll under the seat behind her.

“Shove her head round a bit with an oar,” she said, “and then get the sails on her.”

The boat, her mainsail hoisted, edged her way slowly out of the cove, nosing her way almost into the teeth of the wind, while Basil pulled on the fore-sail halyards. Mary let her away a little when she met the sea outside. The boat heeled over till her gunwale was awash, plunging heavily into the waves that met her. Mary, grasping the tiller, leaned far back to windward. She stretched her feet out against the seat opposite her in the pointed stern of the boat. Basil, crouching on the floor-boards behind the gunwale, looked back at her. Her hair was blown from under her sou'wester across her face. The spray, when the boat struck the waves, flew past her in showers, and bright drops glistened on her face. Never, not amid the calculated lights of a ballroom, not on horseback in the hunting field, had he seen any girl who looked so beautiful.

It was a dead beat to windward out of the bay. The boat plunged forward on the port tack across a stretch of tumbling, white-topped waves. Here and there were broad patches of foaming water, and spots where tall columns of spray rose high into the air. The whole bay was strewn with rocks, submerged, or half-submerged, or fronting the racing waves with heads raised defiantly. Basil was no coward in a boat, but he was not one of those who fear little because they know little. He hoped earnestly that Mary was sure of her way among the rocks and queer tide rips. He liked this adventurous sail with her ; but he half wished that Mahony was with him, instead of lurking concealed somewhere

on shore. He wondered why the old man had refused to come. Mahony had threaded his way through this mass of rocks all his life. He might have been counted on as a pilot. About Mary's courage and her skill as a helmswoman he had now no doubt, but he wished he were as sure of her knowledge of the bay.

"Ready about," said Mary. "There's no use our standing on into the cross tide under the Dilisk Rock."

She pointed forward. A hundred yards ahead of them Basil saw that the waves rose extraordinarily high, and broke confusedly over each other. A broad belt of seaweed-covered rock rose beyond the wildest of the tumult. He understood what that meant. Two streams of ebbing tide met in fierce strife behind the rocks. Mary knew the place and its danger. He began to feel more confidence in her ability.

"Lee-O," said Mary.

She had sailed to the very edge of the confused welter of waves before she put the tiller down. Basil slacked off the jib-sheet and knelt amidships while the boat hung for a moment in the wind, plunging heavily. She swung slowly round. Basil, sheeting home the jib again, looked back. Behind them lay the inner part of Lishreen Bay and the entrance to the little harbour, with its perches and its buoys. Amid the shining stretch of dancing waves Basil saw another boat was coming out and had already passed the narrow part of the channel. He told Mary what he saw.

She glanced back for an instant.

"She looks like Macdermot's pookaun," she said.

"Can you see if there's a white patch on the peak of her mainsail?"

The boat behind them was flung up into the wind and went about. Basil could see her sails plainly.

"Yes," he said, "there's a triangular white patch and her jib is nearly black; much darker than the mainsail."

"That's the pookaun all right," said Mary. "I know that rotten old jib of Macdermot's. I expect Jimmy Rafferty's sailing her. He's a great friend of Macdermot's, and if he wanted a boat it's that one he'd take. I shouldn't wonder a bit if he was after us."

"But how can he be after us?" said Basil. "He didn't know—he couldn't possibly know—that we were going out."

"You'd wonder," said Mary, "what Jimmy Rafferty would know. If you asked him he'd probably be able to tell you what you had for dinner yesterday."

Basil looked back, watching the pookaun attentively.

"He's sailing her for all she's worth," he said.

"Well," said Mary, "we can do that, too. Get in a bit more of the mainsheet."

Basil hauled on the wet rope, and the boat heeled over more than ever. Instead of rising over the seas she struck the tops of them defiantly. The showers of spray that flew over them grew thicker and heavier. Mary was quite undismayed.

"I think she'd do better with the jib a bit flatter," she said.

She peered under the boom critically while Basil trimmed the sail.

"Do you know," she said, "I've been sailing all my life, and this is the first time I've ever raced. Rather exciting, isn't it?"

It was. Mary disdained to ease up into the wind for any except the very largest waves. The boat plunged heavily into the troughs of the sea. Large blobs of green water slopped on board now and then just aft of the lee shrouds. In the bottom of the boat the water was washing about, surging fore and aft as bow and stern rose and fell. Two loose floorboards were floating, and an oar rolled over and over under the thwarts.

"You'd better bail a bit," said Mary; "there's a tin somewhere under the stern sheets."

Basil fumbled about and found it. Thereafter he worked hard, pitching gallons of water overboard. The tacks were short, for the rocks were too many to give a chance or a long leg either way, and Basil's bailing was interrupted by the necessity of working the jib-sheets and scrambling up to windward when the boat went about. He saw just enough of what was happening to admire Mary's skill and daring. Now and then he glanced back at the pookaun.

"She's gaining on us fast," he said.

There was no doubt about that. Tack after tack brought the pursuing boat nearer. It became possible to see that there were four men in her. Ten minutes later Basil could discern the men's faces. Jimmy Rafferty was at the tiller. Forward near the mast was a man whom he did not know. Crouched amidships were Cohen and Kaitcer.

"They'll be on top of us at the end of this tack," said Basil at last.

He was not quite clear what would happen after that; but the excitement of the race had braced his nerves. He was prepared for a sea fight amid the plunging, foaming waves, was ready to repel boarders with a stretcher and fling rowlocks at the enemy.

They were on the port tack again. The sea was a little calmer, and the bailing did not demand all Basil's energy. He rose to his knees and looked about him. A hundred yards or so to windward lay a long shelf of rocks. Part of it was seaweed-covered, and plainly submerged at high tide. In other places the rocks rose grey or black, and at high tide must have stood out as islands. It was the shelter of this reef which made the water calmer. On the far side of it the sea broke furiously.

"That's Corrigeen Glas Reef," said Mary.

Basil remembered what Sir Amos had said about the reef the night before. At the westward end of it was a tide-race. They must stand out to sea beyond it for a mile before they dared to go about and cross the end of the reef.

"There's Inishraher behind the reef," said Mary.

Basil saw the island, low and green, a mile to windward of the reef. He saw Mahony's white cottage standing on the very shore of a small sheltered bay. He saw the brown turf stack beside it, a boat hauled up on the beach, a bullock grazing in the field above. It looked very peaceful and safe.

"Once we go about," said Mary, "we'll have a clear reach down to the island, but we've got to stand on a long way yet."

Basil could see the reef stretching out to sea beyond

them ; and they had a mile to sail past the end of it. Basil looked back. The pookaun was no more than fifty yards behind them. She was not gaining quite so fast in the calm water, but she was still picking them up rapidly enough.

Mary, seated tense and rigid at the tiller, gazed out at the end of the reef. Then she too looked back. The pookaun was rushing through the water dead astern of them. Jimmy Rafferty was certainly not afraid to sail his boat hard.

"We can't do it," said Mary. "Long before we get to the point of the reef she'll be alongside of us."

She looked over her shoulder and scanned the reef to windward earnestly.

"Now," she said suddenly, "ready about."

To Basil the order seemed mere madness. A few minutes' sailing on the starboard tack would run them right up against the reef. They would be forced to go about again almost at once. Jimmy Rafferty, in the pookaun, would cross their bows when they came on the port tack again. Then there would be no escape for them.

"Lee-O," said Mary, sharply.

The boat swung up into the wind, hesitated for an instant with flapping sails, and then fell away on the starboard tack. She crossed the bow of Rafferty's boat not fifty yards ahead. But Basil had ceased to be interested in the pookaun. He was staring eagerly at the reef which lay right in front of them.

"There's a way through," said Mary.

To Basil it seemed as if there could be no possible

way through. The rocks lay before them in an unbroken line. It flashed through his memory that Mary had spoken of this way through the reef the night before, and that Sir Amos had warned her not to attempt it. He regarded it as too difficult, impossible.

Mary's lips were tight set. Her eyes were fixed steadily on the reef. Her left hand held the tiller firmly. Only the movement of the fingers of her right hand showed any signs of nervousness. They tapped lightly on the gunwale beside her.

"It's just here," she said. "I've been through it twice or three times with Mahony. That grey spike of rock in line with the chimney on the cottage on the island gives us the opening of the passage."

Basil's mouth was so dry that he could not speak. The boat was rushing forward fast. Already the water was shallowing. He could see the swinging weed below him and the ugly jagged rocks.

"I don't say for certain I can do it," said Mary. "It's a bit nasty even if I hit the opening right. But one comfort is that Jimmy Rafferty won't dare to follow us." The water surged and swirled, black and foamless, up and down the rocks ahead of them. Basil could see the clustering mussels upon them and the sharp-backed, gleaming limpet shells. Still, he saw no opening. He crouched with the mainsheet in his hand, sorely tempted to let it run right out and take some of the way off the boat before she struck. The crash seemed perfectly inevitable now.

"When I give the word, slack the mainsheet right away," said Mary, "and, for goodness' sake, be sharp

about it. If she doesn't fall right away when I pull up the tiller, nothing will keep us off the rocks."

The boat headed straight into a narrow cleft. Then Basil saw that instead of ending as it seemed to end in a steep rock, a passage bent sharply away to leeward.

"Slack away," cried Mary. "Slack away for your life. Let the sheet run."

She dragged hard at the tiller, leaning far back and pulling with both hands. Basil let the mainsheet run through his hands, till the boom brought up sharp against the lee shrouds. The boat's head paid off fast, but none too fast; she grazed the shelf of rocks on the starboard side. Then, the mainsail boomed right out, the jib flapping idly, the boat sped on an even keel down a narrow waterway, dead before the wind. Trails of slippery weed brushed the sides with a whispering sound. The water was no more than four feet deep. The passage was so narrow that a pair of oars set in the rowlocks would have touched the rocks on either side. Basil, his nerves tense with excitement, his lips and mouth parched, was conscious of a stretch of half-submerged rock ahead of him. On the starboard side the rocks rose higher, rough and threatening, clear out of the water.

"Stand by to luff up," said Mary, "Let go the jib-sheet and haul in your main. Basil ceased to look around or ahead of him. He crouched with the mainsheet in his hands watching Mary's face.

"Now!" she cried.

But a fraction of a second before her words reached him he saw in her eyes that the moment had come.

He cast off the jib-sheet from its cleet and hauled in the mainsheet hand over hand. The boat listed heavily as she swung up into the wind. Water poured over the lee gunwale. The jib flapped wildly, its sheets thrashing to and fro. There was a sudden sharp knock on the keel. The boat stood still for an instant, heeling over. Then she bounded forward again.

"We're over it," said Mary. "Get in the jib-sheet."

But the order was useless. The boat flew up into the wind, head-reached with flapping sails, and at last slid, gently enough, on to a seaweed-covered rock.

Basil looked at Mary in amazement. It should have been easy to avoid this final disaster. A single pull on the tiller would have kept the boat from flying up into the wind and the rest of the reef lay clear before them.

"Rudder's gone," said Mary. "One of the irons, I fancy, or a pintle. The bottom of it must have touched when we bumped over the rock. Annoying, isn't it? And I knew there was a rock there somewhere. Mahony pointed it out to me twice, only I couldn't exactly remember which side of the channel it was. Just before we luffed I was sure it was on the port side, and that I had got to luff hard past it. Then all of a sudden I had a feeling that it was on my starboard hand, and I had got to luff round it. I tried the exact middle of the passage, which, as it turned out, was the worst thing I could have done, for the beastly rock was there. However, I'll remember next time. Dad says that the only way

of really learning rocks is to run on them. Being told is no use."

The boat, with her flapping sails, lay quietly enough on an even keel. Basil noticed that the water was running past her sides in a swift stream. The tide was still ebbing fast.

"Just fling out the anchor, will you?" said Mary. "Not that it really matters about the anchor. She'll stay where she is all right." She peered over the side as she spoke. "In another half-hour she'll be high and dry. We'll have to stay here till the tide rises, which is tiresome. Anyhow, we've escaped Jimmy Rafferty. He'll never have the nerve to try the passage in the pookaun. She's a lot bigger than this boat. I don't believe it would be possible for her."

Basil dropped the anchor with a splash into the shallow water. Then, standing on a thwart, he gazed out across the rocks.

"The pookaun has gone about," he said. "She's heading for the reef now."

"I wonder if he's going to try the passage," said Mary. "He'll be a fool if he does. He'll be ashore long before he gets this far. She's a long-keeled boat, and I don't believe it's possible to handle her quick enough to get through."

But Rafferty was by no means a fool. He knew his boat and he knew the nature of the passage. Before he reached the reef he lowered his sails, got out a pair of sweeps, and rowed cautiously up to the rocks. The man near the mast sprang ashore with a rope, which he made fast to a rock. Then he held the end of the bowsprit while Rafferty jumped out.

After that there was a consultation, a good deal of shouting, and much pulling of arms and legs. Finally Cohen and Kaitcer were got ashore.

"I call that cowardly," said Mary. "When Jimmy Rafferty funked the passage he ought to have gone away. No sportsman would come at us on foot across the rocks where we're stuck here and can't stir."

But Jimmy Rafferty was out for business, not for sport, while Cohen and Kaitcer were not the kind of men who took risks for the fun of the thing. They left the pookaun riding off the rocks with one man on board to take care of her. The others started across the rocks to where Mary and Basil sat in their boat. It was a rough scramble and it was plain from the start that Kaitcer did not like it. He stepped timidly into the water when it was necessary to wade and went down on his hands and knees in particularly slippery places. Once or twice Rafferty had to take him by the arm and pull him along. Basil slipped off his coat and grasped one of the stretchers which floated about in the bottom of the boat. He meant to make a fight of it. There was one thing in his position which cheered him. There was still a foot of running water round the boat, and underneath it a sheet of tangled, slippery weed. It would not be easy for anyone to get at them. He sincerely hoped that Rafferty had left his revolver at home.

Rafferty and his party finished their scramble at last. They stood on a rock looking down at the boat, not fifteen feet away from her.

"You know what we want," said Rafferty. "You may as well give it to us and save any more trouble."

Mary held up the oilskin-covered roll.

"That it?" she said, and laughed.

Basil heard the laugh with delight. She was mocking Rafferty. It was plain that she, too, meant to fight. He flourished his stretcher defiantly.

"Come and take it if you want it," he said.

Then an amazing thing happened. Mary flung the roll across the narrow stretch of water, flung it neatly and accurately into Rafferty's arms. Basil dropped his stretcher in astonishment. Even Rafferty was so much taken by surprise that he was only just in time to catch the roll. Kaitcer, of the whole party, seemed the most self-possessed.

"Thank you, Miss Coppinger," he said. "I'm glad to receive it at last. And please tell your father that I bear him no ill-will, none at all. I shall send him the cheque I promised him. I do not wish him to be a loser though he has put us to a great deal of trouble. He shall have the £50."

He and his party scrambled back to their boat. Basil, furious rage in his heart, watched them hoist their sails. A few minutes later they were flying before the wind towards the little harbour.

He turned to Mary. She was sitting in the stern of the boat laughing quietly.

CHAPTER XXV

MANY girls with a joke and a secret which their lovers did not know would have rejoiced in a chance of teasing. But Mary had a simple mind and a gentle heart. She found no pleasure in annoying Basil. She stopped laughing and spoke to him.

"It'll be a bit of a sell for those lads," she said, "when they find they haven't got the picture after all."

Then, as if she had said enough to make the situation quite clear to Basil, she stooped down, picked up the end of her skirt, and wrung it out. A stream of sea water ran out between her fingers.

"But they have got it," he said. "I saw you give it to them."

"Oh no, they haven't," said Mary. "They've got half an old hearthrug, neatly sewed up in three bits of sacking, and then a sheet of oilskin. I did the sewing myself with a sail needle and a palm which I borrowed from Mahony yesterday. It'll take them some time to get the parcel opened. I expect they won't try till they're ashore. They'll be so afraid of getting the precious thing wet that they'll wait till they get back to the hotel. Sure to. My word, I should like to be a fly on the ceiling when they pull

off the last covering. Their faces would be worth seeing. And their language. I expect there'll be some rather naughty words flying about. Jimmy Rafferty has the name of being able to curse a bit. I would like to hear him."

"But the picture?" said Basil. "If they haven't got it, where is it?"

"I can't tell you that, for I don't know. Dad's an extremely secretive kind of person. He never tells anybody anything unless he can't possibly help it. He wouldn't have told me what I had in that oilskin roll if he hadn't wanted me to sew it up. I expect he has the picture safe at home; but I don't know."

She laughed again, long and merrily.

"I suppose you know," she said, "that we're stuck here for hours. We simply can't get off till the tide rises a bit higher than it was when we ran on this rock. Even then we shall have to steer with an oar. But it must be nearly dead ebb now. Lucky for us, isn't it? We may perhaps get off in another two hours or two hours and a half. Do you mind much?"

"I wish," said Basil, "that we had to stay here for six hours, or ten."

"You'd be very hungry," said Mary.

"Or for ever," said Basil. "I'd like to stay here for ever with you."

She was standing in the stern sheets of the boat. He stepped aft from his place beside the mast and took her hand. Mary made no attempt to snatch it from him, nor did she show the smallest sign of embarrassment. She allowed him to hold it in a cold, damp clasp for a minute. Then she withdrew

it gently and stepped over the side of the boat into the shallow water which still lay round them. She waded to a high rock and there sat down.

"I suppose now," she said, "that that's what's called paying me compliments, and I dare say that it's quite the proper thing to do, but it was never done to me before, and to tell you the truth I'm not quite sure that I like it."

"But I mean it," said Basil. "Mary, I really mean what I say. I'd ask nothing better than just to live here with you away from the world and everybody and everything."

Basil, like most young men who are violently in love, was foolish. Mary remained maddeningly sensible.

"You wouldn't live long," she said. "You'd die in a few days of pains in the stomach through having nothing to eat but limpets and raw crabs."

Basil stepped into the water and followed her ashore.

"Mary," he said, "it's cruel to laugh at me. Don't you know that I love you?"

"I don't know any such thing," she said. "How could I?"

"I've loved you ever since the first minute I saw you," said Basil.

She looked at him coolly, almost critically. He had crossed the rocks and stood near her, but he did not venture very close to her and he made no attempt to take her hand again.

"But you don't care anything about me," he said. "Why should you? It would be too much to expect."

"I like you better than I like Jimmy Rafferty,"

she said, "or any of those lads that go about with him. There now. I've said that much, and I hope it's some comfort to you."

It was very little comfort to him. He knew that she detested Jimmy Rafferty and despised his followers.

"I wouldn't say," she went on, "but I might like you better than Mr. Cohen, though he always was mighty polite to me when he was round selling tea to my mother."

Basil thought that she was laughing at him, playing with him as cruelly as a cat might with a mouse. Yet he could not feel angry with her. He turned away sorrowfully and sat down on a distant rock with his back turned towards her. He stared dismally out to sea.

"Mr. Price, Mr. Price."

Mary's voice, raised to a shout, forced itself to him against the wind. He turned round.

"If I was to say," she shouted, "that I'd rather be here with you than Charlie Royce, would that content you?"

That did not content Basil in the least. He turned from her again and once more stared gloomily at the rocks.

"Mr. Price."

She did not shout this time. Her voice sounded quite close to him. He turned quickly and saw that she had left her rock, crossed the reef and stood within a few yards of him.

"Mr. Price," she said. "Don't be angry with me. Sure Jimmy Rafferty and Mr. Cohen and Charlie Royce are the only young men in all the world that

ever I spoke to, and if I say I'd rather have you than them what more can I say ? ”

Basil rose and drew nearer to her, a sudden hope filling his heart.

“ Mary, Mary dearest,” he cried, “ say that you care for me a little.”

Mary smiled.

“ And isn't that what I'm saying to you,” she said, “ only how can you expect me to say it all at once ? ”

A rapturous hope seized Basil. He stumbled forwards towards her over the slippery rocks. Then he stopped short, gazing at her across a pool which lay between them, feasting his eyes on the beauty of her face.

“ I suppose now,” said Mary, “ that it's what they call making love to me you are, and that's what nobody ever did before, and I'm not sure do I know the right way to behave.”

“ I'm not *making* love to you, Mary,” he said, “ I'm—I'm half mad with love for you. Will you not say one word to me ? ”

“ What is it you want me to say ? ”

“ I want you to say that you love me,” said Basil.

He had grown very bold, encouraged by a look in her eyes.

“ It's little I know about love-making,” she said, “ seeing this is the first time ever I tried it, but I'm thinking that you must know less if you expect a girl to be shouting things like that to you across the half of the wide sea. I'd be ashamed of my life to be whispering as much, even supposing I meant it, and I don't know yet if I do.”

Basil was not to be discouraged this time, even by the last words that she spoke. He ran towards her, splashing through the pool which lay between them. But the bottom of the pool was rough and slippery. Basil stumbled, tried to regain his footing, slipped wildly, and came down flat at her feet with a splash. It was the attitude of the humblest and most adoring of lovers ; but it was neither dignified nor graceful. Mary laughed. But not even her merriment could turn Basil away from her then. He struggled to his knees and grasped both her hands.

" Mary," he cried, " I love you more than all the world, and more than my life. Will you marry me ? "

Mary turned her head away, but she left her hands in his.

" Marrying," she said, " is what's before every girl, unless those that no one wants, and I suppose it might as well be you as another man, only I don't know what it is makes you want to marry me."

" Don't you know," said Basil, " that you're the most beautiful girl in all the world ? "

" I haven't a penny," said Mary, " to bring with me to the house of the man I go to. There isn't as much as a heifer or a sheep for my father to give me."

It occurred to Basil—and there is no doubt that it ought to have occurred to him sooner—that he had no money either. But at the moment it did not seem to him that money mattered in the least, or that the want of it was any obstacle to marriage.

" I'm glad you have no money," he said. " I've none either. But I'll work ; I'll make money for you, Mary."

“It won’t break my heart if you don’t,” said Mary. “Sure, I’m well used to doing without it, seeing I never remember the day when I or any belonging to me had a pound to spend. It would be a queer thing if I couldn’t be happy with you, Basil, money or no money, seeing I never had, nor I never dreamed to have, anything in all my life that’s half so fine or half so good or half so dear as you are, Basil.”

“There, now,” she said, a minute later. “Have I said enough to please you? For I’m ashamed to have said as much, only, Basil, it went from my mouth in spite of me, because I meant it in my heart.”

CHAPTER XXVI

ROYCE congratulated himself too soon. He had by no means done with Basil's or Sir Amos Coppinger's affairs. As he passed the door of the post-office a red-haired girl ran out to meet him. Royce knew her. She was the telegraph girl whose intelligence and devotion to duty he had praised when Lord Edmund Troyte's telegram to Basil arrived.

"There's a wire after coming for you, forwarded on from Carnew," she said, "and I don't know whether you'd like it delivered to you or not."

"Of course I want it delivered to me," said Royce. "Why not?"

"I thought maybe you'd like it sent back to London," said the girl, "the same as the rest was."

"The same as what rest?" said Royce. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about the wires that came for the other gentleman, Mr. Price his name was."

Then Royce recollected the telegram about the boundaries of Albania, and the orders he had given about it.

"I should very much like you to send it back," said Royce, "but I'm afraid there's no use your saying that I'm not known here or in Carnew. The

post-office people in London may be fools, but you can hardly expect them to swallow that statement. You'd better give it to me."

The girl ran into the office and returned with a telegraph form in her hand. Royce read :

"Have heard nothing from my secretary, Basil Price. Am puzzled and anxious. I shall go to Dublin by night mail to-night and expect to be in Carnew at midday. Please meet train if possible.—TROYTE."

Royce was scarcely surprised that Lord Edmund was puzzled and anxious. The complete silence of his secretary and the return of his telegrams one after another must have been very difficult to understand. But he had not expected Lord Edmund to take such prompt and vigorous action. He realized that he must certainly meet the train in Carnew. He felt that it would be extremely difficult to account for Basil's conduct.

He walked back to the hotel thinking deeply.

He found Lady Coppinger waiting for him, looking as helpless and woebegone as usual, but not quite so slatternly.

When she saw Royce she fumbled in a bag which she carried, produced a letter, and handed it to him. It was from Sir Amos.

"MY DEAR CHARLIE,—I expect you are going back to Carnew this morning. If so, will you give my wife a seat in your car? She has some rather urgent business to do there, and, as you know, I have no

way of driving her. If you can bring her back in the afternoon, so much the better. If not, I'm afraid she'll have to walk. Excuse my troubling you, and believe me, Yours sincerely, AMOS COPPINGER."

Royce was surprised. He had never before known Sir Amos give the smallest consideration to his wife's comfort or convenience. Nor had he ever imagined that Lady Coppinger could be capable of conducting any business more complicated than the purchase of tea and sugar. It was difficult to imagine what the urgent affairs could be which required her presence in Carnew. However, he certainly intended to go back to Carnew. Sir Amos was right about that. There was no reason for refusing to let Lady Coppinger drive with him. He did not particularly want her company, but he was a kindly man, and would have given a seat in his car to anyone who asked for it.

"I'll take you into Carnew with pleasure," he said.

While Lady Coppinger was fumbling with the handle of the car Royce saw Jimmy Rafferty and one of his friends coming along the road. The day was fine, but they wore oilskin coats and sou'-westers. This struck Royce as odd. They stopped opposite the hotel, sat down on the wall at the other side of the road and waited. They were joined almost immediately by Cohen and Kaitcer. They also wore oilskin coats, which Royce guessed by the look of them to have been borrowed from fishermen. The whole party started off together in the direction of the harbour.

Royce jumped out of the car, disregarding the

tearful appeals of Lady Coppinger. He ran into the hotel, calling loudly for Mick as he went. This time Mick was in the kitchen, and ran out the minute he heard his name called.

"Mick," said Royce, "I've just seen Rafferty and Cohen and Kaitcer going down the road together. Where do you think they're off to?"

"It wouldn't surprise me," said Mick, "if they were on the way to the harbour, nor I wouldn't wonder if they took a boat when they got there. I seen that pookaun of Macdermot's lying at the quay, and it's my opinion that it's it they're going in."

"I suppose they're going after Mr. Price and Miss Coppinger," said Royce.

"That's just what they're doing, and I wouldn't wonder if they caught them. Macdermot's pookaun can sail half as quick again as that boat of Mahony's."

"You're taking it uncommonly coolly," said Royce, "and you seem to know a devil of a lot about what they're doing. Maybe you can tell me how Jimmy Rafferty found out that Mr. Price and Miss Coppinger were going off to the island."

"All I know about it," said Mick, "is that Sir Amos told old Mahony to call and let Rafferty and the rest of them know what was going on. 'Tell them it's half-past ten that Mr. Price is to meet Miss Mary,' said Sir Amos. 'Tell them that it's out to Inishraher they're going, but don't give it as a message from me,' says Sir Amos. 'Let them find it out from your talk as if you didn't mean to be telling it.' Well, your honour, when old Mahony told me what was wanted I did it, and I did it the way it should be done. I give you my word there wasn't a thing

I said but Rafferty had to pull it out of me as if it was the best tooth I had, and me very unwilling to part with it. It would have done you good to hear him asking me this and asking me that, and me pretending I was set against telling him, or maybe had forgotten, but telling it to him in the latter end. That's what old Mahony told me Sir Amos wanted done."

"Well, I'm damned," said Royce.

"I'm glad it's not me your damning this time," said Mick, "for I've had my 'nough of that from you."

"Oh, I apologize," said Royce. "I take back every word I said and every curse I threw at you, only—well, I am damned if I know what Sir Amos is at at all."

He felt, not for the first time in his life, that the ways of Sir Amos were beyond him. He went back to his car and drove Lady Coppinger into Carnew.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHEN he reached the outskirts of the little town Royce turned to Lady Coppinger. "Now," he said, "where do you want to go? I'll drop you anywhere you like. Shall I take you to the bank, or the railway station, or Fogarty's shop?"

She shook her head decisively at each of Royce's suggestions. He slowed down the car to a crawl and asked her again where she wanted to go.

"If it's quite convenient to you," she said, "I'd as soon go straight to your office."

That, of course, was very convenient to Royce. But it was also a little disappointing. Like most intelligent men, he was interested in his neighbours' affairs, and he was very curious about Lady Coppinger's urgent business. He might have been able to make a guess at what it was if he had found out where she went in Carnew. But if she left him at the door of his own office—he tried again.

"I'll drop you there, of course, if you like," he said, "but it won't be a bit of trouble to me to run you round anywhere you want to go."

"It was to the office that himself bid me go," said Lady Coppinger.

At the door of his office Royce stopped the car

and helped Lady Coppinger to get out. Then he said good-bye to her, expressing a polite hope that she was not cold. To his surprise she followed him into the office. She followed him past the clerk's desk in the outer office into his own private room. There she sat down.

Royce could only suppose that her urgent business was with him.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked.

"It was to you that himself bid me come," said Lady Coppinger, "into your own room where there'd be nobody else only the two of us."

"Very well," he said, "I'm ready to listen to you, Lady Coppinger, and I need scarcely say I'll give you the best advice that I can. Take your own time and tell me what the trouble is. Begin at the beginning, and don't be the least shy or nervous."

Lady Coppinger, however, displayed every sign of shyness and nervousness. After several moments' hesitation she began in a way which very greatly surprised Royce. She stood up and took off her bead-trimmed mantle. She folded it carefully and laid it on the chair behind her. Then she took off her gloves, a difficult business because of their tightness. Having set her hands free she went on to unhook the front of her bodice. Royce stared at her in blank amazement. Ladies who engage in divorce proceedings often, so we believe, bare their souls in their lawyers' offices, but he had never heard that they were accustomed to strip their bodies too. Yet that was what Lady Coppinger seemed to be doing. And she displayed no other symptoms of

madness. She spoke quite calmly, and there was no wildness in her eyes.

Having unhooked her bodice she loosened the waistband of her skirt. Then she paused, and looked at Royce with a curious, embarrassed smile.

"Would you mind going out of the room for one minute, Mr. Royce?" she said.

Royce was very much inclined to fly at once. But curiosity was stronger in him than modesty. He wanted to know why he was to be turned out of his own office.

"What do you want me to do that for?" he asked.

Lady Coppinger appeared greatly embarrassed. She even blushed, slightly, a thing scarcely to be expected from a woman who had been married to Sir Amos for twenty years.

"I'm an old woman," she said. "Nobody knows that better than me. And you're a married man, so maybe there'll be no harm in it. But for all that I'd rather not be undressing myself with you sitting there looking at me. If you don't want to leave the room I'd be obliged to you if you'd turn your back and look out of the window for a minute or two. I'll not keep you long."

"But," said Royce, "why on earth do you want to undress here? What are you doing it for?"

"It was himself bid me," said Lady Coppinger.

Before he spoke again Lady Coppinger had slipped one arm out of the sleeve of her bodice. Royce turned and left the room hurriedly.

Ten minutes later Lady Coppinger called him. He was standing with his back to the fire in the outer office smoking a cigarette to soothe his nerves. He

pretended not to hear her voice, though she called quite loudly. Lady Godiva had annulled the debts of a whole town by—— But Royce did not see how the scheme was to work out in the case of Sir Amos's creditors, and he had no wish to play the part of Peeping Tom.

She called him again, urgently. The clerk looked up from his typewriter.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Royce," he said, "but I think the lady in your room is calling you."

Royce could not possibly ignore his clerk's warning. Lady Coppinger continued to call loudly. He feared that if he kept her waiting any longer she might come out and look for him, to the great scandal of the clerk. He opened the door of his own room and looked in. He was immensely relieved to find that Lady Coppinger was fully dressed again. She had even put on the tight black gloves.

On the table lay a large roll of canvas. Lady Coppinger pointed to it.

"Himself bid me give it to you," she said.

Royce unrolled the canvas. Before him lay Gainsborough's portrait of the earlier, more beautiful Lady Coppinger.

"But how did you get it here?" he said.

Then the meaning of all that had happened dawned on him.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that you carried it rolled round you under your clothes?"

"It was himself bid me do it," said Lady Coppinger.

Royce sat down in his chair, threw his head back and laughed.

"Well, of all the stratagems——" he said.

Point after point of the scheme made itself clear to him.

"And to think of Rafferty and Cohen and Kaitcer going off in a boat to chase Price out into the middle of the Atlantic Ocean."

He laughed again.

"I'd like to see their faces now," he said, "and that sly devil Mick. He deserves a medal for his part in the performance, going up to Rafferty and getting that scoundrel to drag the wrong information out of him."

Once more laughter overtook him.

"And Sir Amos's note to me. And your urgent business, Lady Coppinger. But why didn't you tell me what you were at? I thought you were going mad when you started undressing."

"Himself said," said Lady Coppinger, "that there wasn't to be a word said to you till you had the picture in your hands, for fear you might refuse to take it."

The thought that he was actually in possession of the picture sobered Royce.

"You've put me in the devil of a fix," he said, "or, rather, Sir Amos has. I don't suppose it's your fault. I'm acting for your husband's creditors, and I can't take part in a deliberate attempt to defraud them. I believe the proper thing for me to do is to keep the damned thing in trust for them and sell it for what it's worth. But I can't go back on your husband to that extent, Lady Coppinger. Hang it all, he's trusted me, though the Lord knows I didn't want him to do it."

Lady Coppinger took no notice of what he said. She went to the door of the room, opened it quietly,

and passed into the outer office. Royce shouted after her.

"Come back. Come back at once."

The clerk, who was an intelligent young man, heard his master's shouts. He stopped Lady Coppinger before she reached the street door and led her back to Royce's private room.

"Here," said Royce sternly. "Take this infernal thing away with you. I'm not going to keep it."

Lady Coppinger looked at the picture but made no motion to take it. Royce rolled it up and tried to place it in her hands. But Lady Coppinger backed away from him towards the door.

"What himself said to me was this," she said. "'As soon as it's in Mr. Royce's hands,' says he, 'let you be off as quick as you can; and no matter what he says nor what he does,' says he, 'don't you lay a finger on it again, for if you do I'll not be pleased with you.'"

She backed her way through the door while she was speaking Sir Amos's words. In the outer office, more it seemed for the benefit of the clerk than of Royce, she quoted her husband once more.

"'Mr. Royce will take care of it,' says he; 'once he has it he'll not be able to help taking care of it.'"

CHAPTER XXVIII

LORD EDMUND'S train was half an hour late, not at all an unusual thing with trains running into Carnew. This unpunctuality is generally slightly annoying to the passengers and very irritating to those who are standing about in the station waiting to meet their friends. Royce, an active-minded man, hated this particular way of wasting time, and generally abused the station-master. But this day the long wait was a gain to him. It enabled him to recover from his depression, and to regain his self-esteem.

He walked up and down the platform, and began to find some comfort in the thought that he was not the only person Sir Amos had tricked. Cohen and Kaitcer, both of them keen business men, had been completely outwitted by an old country gentleman. Then he thought of the voyage which Cohen and Kaitcer made in an open boat across the stormy bay, and felt cheered. He felt even more cheered when he thought of the impotent rage of Jimmy Rafferty. The story of Rafferty's pursuit of Mary Coppinger would be an excellent one to tell. Royce saw his way to making it extremely funny, and he knew he could count on most of the people in Lishreen and Carnew to laugh, repeat the tale, and improve on it.

Royce, tramping the platform with steps that grew steadily jauntier, forgave Sir Amos for the trick he had played him. Long before the train arrived he was cheery and self-confident again. When at last the engine steamed into the station he was ready to meet anyone, a Prime Minister, a King, an Emperor, even a President of the Irish Republic, an institution just then at the height of its splendour.

There was not the least difficulty in finding Lord Edmund. There was only one first-class passenger in the train. Royce greeted him with unembarrassed friendliness.

"Lord Edmund Troyte?" he said. "I'm delighted to meet you. My name is Royce—Charlie Royce. I hope you had a pleasant journey. You'll be wanting a bit of lunch. What do you think? Will you try the hotel, or will you come home with me and take pot-luck? I don't know what my wife will have, for I didn't see her this morning, but there's sure to be something."

Lord Edmund was accustomed to dealing with many kinds of men—Balkan statesmen, English Labour leaders, Americans with policies for turning the world into an Eden, practical men who wanted a trade revival. He always found that quiet dignity—the incomparable dignity of an English gentleman—produced a most desirable impression. He tried it with Royce.

"Ah," he said, "Mr. Royce. Yes, quite so, Mr. Royce. You received my telegram?"

"Got it at ten this morning," said Royce. "I was out at Lishreen at the time, but I bounded into my motor at once and drove home as fast as I dared

—rather faster than I ought. Lady Coppinger was jumped about in the back of the car like a pea in a penny whistle, and she's not accustomed to it, poor old thing. Perhaps you know her."

"I telegraphed to you," said Lord Edmund, "about my private secretary, Basil Price. I'm rather puzzled about him—puzzled and anxious."

"You said that in your wire," said Royce.

"I have heard nothing from him since he left London," said Lord Edmund. "I sent him a number of telegrams which were returned to me by the post-office. Not one of them seems to have been delivered. I became nervous. Considering the present unsettled state of Ireland one is naturally anxious about anyone who disappears. If Price were the kind of man who leaves telegrams unanswered, I should have been less anxious about him. But he's always most scrupulous and careful. When I tell you that my telegrams were concerned with a most important international affair you will understand that——"

"Ah!" said Royce. "That Commission about the frontiers of Albania."

Lord Edmund was startled. The frontiers of Albania are, of course, a matter of great public importance. There was nothing surprising in Royce's interest in the subject. But the existence of a Commission was a profound political secret. No hint of its appointment had crept into any newspaper. Lord Edmund did not understand how Royce came to know about it, unless—— He became very suspicious. Price would never, he felt sure, have spoken about the Commission. Could Royce possibly have read his telegrams?

"I hope you found the papers you wanted all right," said Royce. "They were in one of your filing boxes, and a glance under the heading 'Albania' would have shown you——"

"Mr. Royce," said Lord Edmund gravely, "it appears to me that you—— I hesitate to make such a suggestion, but it seems to me that you must have been meddling with my private correspondence."

"Oh, I would hardly call telegrams private correspondence," said Royce. "Such lots of people have to read them, you know. But, anyway, that doesn't matter, does it?"

He smiled, and Royce, when he liked, could smile with most disarming sweetness.

"I mean to say," he went on, "we'll all manage to struggle along somehow even if the boundaries of Albania are never settled." Lord Edmund was not of that opinion. But he had not time to think of a suitable answer to such an outrageous statement before Royce went on again.

"And, anyway," he said, "it wasn't to settle the boundaries of Albania that you came here, was it now? You've just told me it was because you were anxious about poor Price. Do you know, Price strikes me as one of the nicest boys I've met for years. A fine specimen of the best kind of young Englishman—at least he would be if he wasn't Welsh. After all, what does Albania matter compared to Price?"

Lord Edmund, who was a fair-minded man, recognized that there was some truth in what Royce said. He had not travelled all the way to Connaught in the hope of obtaining fresh light on the Albanian

question, and he was really anxious about Basil, for whom he had a strong affection.

"Can you tell me anything about him?" he said.

"I can relieve your anxiety about him at once," said Royce. "He's safe, perfectly safe."

Lord Edmund was genuinely relieved. But once his anxiety was removed his mind went back to his telegrams, Basil's incomprehensible silence, and Royce's strange knowledge of the existence of the Albanian Commission. A frown gathered on his forehead.

"If Price is safe," he said, "perhaps you will be kind enough to tell me how it is that my telegrams have remained unanswered, and my private affairs, or, rather, confidential national affairs, have been discussed in public?"

Royce saw at once that in relieving Lord Edmund's anxiety he had injured Basil's character, perhaps destroyed his future prospects as a private secretary. He felt that he had been too hasty in announcing Basil's safety. So long as that was in doubt Lord Edmund might have been content to leave the question of the telegrams aside. But every statement can be qualified. Royce immediately qualified his.

"At least," he said, "Price was perfectly safe when I left him this morning; but I'm afraid he's quite likely to be drowned by this time."

"Drowned!" said Lord Edmund.

"Yes," said Royce, "it's blowing pretty hard. I dare say you noticed that when you were crossing in the mail-boat last night, and Lishreen Bay is full of nasty rocks and shoals, not at all the place for a stranger to go sailing in an open boat. And between ourselves I don't think that Mahony's boat is particu-

larly seaworthy. However, we must hope for the best. Price may be a strong swimmer. Do you happen to know if he is ? ”

The thought of Price a pallid corpse washed about among uncharted rocks ought, Royce felt, to make Lord Edmund anxious again, and divert his thoughts from the unanswered telegrams. But perhaps Lord Edmund knew that Basil was a particularly strong swimmer ; or perhaps he did not believe all that Royce said about the dangers of Lishreen Bay. He got back to his main point in a way which disconcerted Royce.

“ If, as you tell me,” he said, “ Price was alive this morning, why didn’t he reply to my telegrams yesterday ? ”

That was a difficult question to answer ; but Royce was not going to give up his friend’s cause without a further effort.

“ The fact is,” he said, “ that ever since he’s been here Price has been working night and day. He has been up against difficulties—perfectly appalling difficulties—and he has been in almost constant peril.”

Lord Edmund looked at him with an expression of mingled surprise and distrust.

“ But his business here was perfectly simple,” he said. “ I should have supposed he could have settled about the fishing in an hour without the slightest difficulty, certainly without any danger.”

“ The fishing,” said Royce. “ Oh yes, of course, the fishing.”

He had forgotten for the moment that it was the salmon-fishing of Lishreen River which originally brought Price to Ireland.

"And I think," said Lord Edmund, "that it was with you that the question about the fishing had to be settled."

"Oh," said Royce, "that wretched little fishing business could have been settled in a few minutes. In fact, we might as well settle it now. You can fish as much as ever you like. You can begin to-day if you want to. I'll lend you a rod with pleasure. What do you say to starting at once? I'll run you out to Lishreen in my car, and I think I can safely promise you a salmon."

But Lord Edmund had not won his position as a great statesman without possessing a capacity for sticking to his point.

"I'm still unable to understand," he said, "why my telegrams remained unanswered."

"It is difficult, I quite admit that it is difficult, to understand that," said Royce, "unless you know what Price has been doing. Once you know that you will see that the fishing—and even your telegrams—I deliberately say your telegrams—are matters of very small importance."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me," said Lord Edmund, "what Price has been doing."

Royce was scarcely prepared to do this. He felt that the story was a long and complicated one, not likely to be satisfactory to Lord Edmund. He shook his head gravely, assuming an air of professional dignity.

"Without breach of confidence," he said, "I can scarcely enter into an explanation. That would involve the discussion of the affairs of some clients of mine. You appear to forget, Lord Edmund, that I am a professional man."

"Very well," said Lord Edmund, "I must ask Price that question when I meet him."

His tone suggested that he meant to insist on getting an answer from Price. He also made it clear that he had no more to say to Royce by walking away towards the far end of the platform. But Royce was not easily shaken off. He felt strongly that he must talk Lord Edmund into a more amiable mood before Price suffered his cross-examination.

He, too, walked down the platform and overtook Lord Edmund at the gate leading to the road.

"By the way," he said, "are you fond of picture dealers?"

Lord Edmund stopped in amazement. Never, not even among the chosen leaders of small nations which went in for self-determination, had he met anyone so persistent and so inconsequent as Royce. But it is the glory of an English gentleman that his dignity is not easily disturbed. He replied calmly:

"There are several picture dealers for whom I have a great respect."

"Do you know one called Kaitcer?"

But Lord Edmund saw no reason why he should be heckled on totally irrelevant matters. He had come to Carnew to talk about Price, telegrams, Albanian boundaries, and salmon fishing. The range of subjects seemed to him sufficiently wide. He was not prepared to discuss picture dealing as well. Without saying a word about Kaitcer he turned his back on Royce and walked rapidly down the road. Royce ran after him and soon overtook him.

"I'm sure," he said, "you don't like ruffians—

the kind of murderous ruffians who pretend to be patriotic and are simply highwaymen."

"I'm not interested in such people," said Lord Edmund.

"That's a pity," said Royce, "for unless you're fond of picture-dealers and are more or less interested in murderers it's difficult to tell you what Price has been doing."

Lord Edmund walked on, slightly quickening his pace, but he was mistaken if he thought that he could out-distance Royce.

"I suppose you like pretty girls," said Royce. "Every man must, when they're really pretty, and the one I'm going to talk about is actually lovely!"

Lord Edmund in the course of a long life spent in the public service had seen as many pretty girls as he wanted to, and had ceased to be interested in the creatures. He walked on without even looking round.

Royce, though he was not a professional diplomatist, had some theories about human nature on which he always acted in dealing with people who showed themselves in any way difficult. He believed, for instance, that every man has a weak point, something in which he is really interested; that the introduction of this subject, whatever it might be, would divert his attention from the business on hand. He was most anxious to turn Lord Edmund's thoughts from the remissness of his secretary in the matter of telegrams. He had tried him with picture-dealers. He had tried him with murderers, a class likely to interest anyone who, as a statesman, is responsible for civilization. He had tried him with pretty girls, and they might be supposed to appeal to men of every

rank and profession. He thought of trying him with horse-races, the foreign exchanges, auction bridge, and golf. But they had been getting over the ground very quickly, owing to Lord Edmund's efforts to escape, and had reached the town before Royce had time to start a new subject.

The sight of the door of his own office reminded him of the picture inside. He remembered at the same moment that, according to Kaitcer, who certainly ought to know, Lord Edmund was deeply interested in art. He hurried after him again, and this time seized his arm.

CHAPTER XXIX

“BY the way,” said Royce, “I’d like to have your opinion of a picture which happens to be in my office, a portrait of a lady in a blue dress, painted by Gainsborough.”

This time, to Royce’s great delight, Lord Edmund was very much interested indeed.

“Absolutely genuine,” said Royce. “Kaitcer thinks it’s genuine.”

“Kaitcer,” said Lord Edmund. “Do you mean Kaitcer of the Carlton Galleries?”

“That exact man,” said Royce. “He’s over here at present. I was trying to tell you about him a moment ago, but you wouldn’t listen to me.”

“If Kaitcer has seen the picture——”

“He’s done a great deal more than see it,” said Royce. “He’s been trying his best to steal it.”

Lord Edmund, in spite of the incredibility of the story, was impressed.

“Perhaps,” he said, “you’ll allow me to see it.”

“That,” said Royce, “is exactly what I want you to do. In fact, I’ve been trying for the last half-hour to propose that you should come and see it. But you kept walking away without looking round, and you wouldn’t listen to a word I said.”

“I didn’t realize till a moment ago,” said Lord

Edmund, "that you were talking about a Gainsborough portrait. You said something about murderers and girls——"

"I had to," said Royce, "in order to show you what Price has been through in order to get that picture for you. He didn't want it for himself in the very least. His one idea was to secure it for you before Kaitcer walked off with it to London. He's been working day and night on land and sea, very often in the sea, up to his neck in it. He fought that ruffian, Jimmy Rafferty, and interviewed Cohen in his bedroom early in the morning, which must have been far more disagreeable than fighting Rafferty—I should hate to see Cohen in bed, wouldn't you? Now you understand why poor Price never replied to those telegrams of yours. He never had a moment to put pen to paper, and he was right, you know, perfectly right. After all, what is Albania? What is Czecho-Slovakia? What, one might almost say, is the Irish Republic compared to a Gainsborough portrait?"

A few minutes later Royce took the picture from the safe and spread it on the table. Lord Edmund examined it carefully. Royce's clerk was sent to borrow a magnifying glass from the doctor, the only man in Carnew who owned one, and Lord Edmund studied the picture through that. It was moved about so that the light fell on it in various ways. Royce and his clerk held it up against one wall and then against another.

"Is there anything known about the history of this picture?" said Lord Edmund at last.

"It has practically no history," said Royce. "It

has been in Lishreen House ever since it was painted until to-day. It's supposed to be the great-grandmother of the present Sir Amos Coppinger."

"Do you think he'd be willing to sell it?" said Lord Edmund.

"Strictly speaking it's not his to sell," said Royce. "It's part of the furniture of the house, and that belongs to a lot of rascally moneylenders who are going to auction up the whole place."

"Kaitcer's opinion carries weight, great weight; but, of course, I'd like to have other advice. I may say, however, that if the picture proves to be genuine, I am prepared to give——"

He named a sum which made Royce gasp. It is difficult to deprive an Irishman of his self-possession and presence of mind when he is engaged in bargaining. If you offer him £100 for a cow for which he never hoped to get more than £20 he will groan and reply that his very lowest price is £150. If you offer him fiscal independence for his country when he hardly expects a modest Home Rule Bill, he will decline to touch anything short of a complete Republic. But Lord Edmund's offer for the picture was so far beyond anything that Royce imagined any picture could be worth that he was actually startled out of all power of bargaining.

"If you give that," he said, "I'll undertake to see that you get the frame without a penny of extra charge. It's genuine, too, quite as genuine as the picture."

He rushed excitedly into the outer office and returned with a bundle of papers in his hand.

"The claims of those moneylenders," he said,

"don't tot up to quite a £1,000. I've got them all here. There may be one or two other debts that I don't know anything about, but they can't amount to much. In fact, it's surprising that any men in the world would have lent Sir Amos so much. I wouldn't care to trust him with a £10 note myself, even if he offered me 3,000 per cent. interest. However, they can all be settled now, and there'll be a nice tidy sum left afterwards. He'll be a richer man than ever he was since I knew him. But—— You won't forget—will you?—that it was Price who got the picture for you? Only for him—I think you ought to do something for Price."

Lord Edmund smiled.

"I suppose I shall have to forgive Price about the telegrams," he said.

"In common decency," said Royce, "you're bound to do a great deal more than that. But we can talk about that later on. We'd better see Sir Amos at once and settle up about buying the picture."

"Subject to my opinion being confirmed by experts," said Lord Edmund.

"Of course," said Royce. "We'll make Kaitcer give us a written guarantee to start with. He'll be glad enough to get off with that. Strictly speaking, he ought to be prosecuted for the way he's been going on here."

CHAPTER XXX

HALF-WAY down the long hill into Lishreen Royce stopped his car abruptly.

He pointed across a boggy bit of ground to a little hill formed by some grey rocks on which the young bracken was growing. Lord Edmund looked at the rocks and scanned the bracken.

"I don't see anyone," he said.

"You wouldn't," said Royce. "But there's a man there all the same, a thoroughly decent old fellow called Mahony, who has an idea that the police are out after him. And he's not quite sure who you are, so he's lying low. But he let me see him as we came down the hill when your head was turned the other way. I'll just call him over here if you don't mind. He's a man you ought to meet."

He shouted and old Mahony, emerging from behind a rock, picked his way slowly across the boggy patch to the road.

Old Mahony reached the road and stood beside the car, silent, respectful, and yet with an air of quiet dignity.

"This," said Royce to Lord Edmund, "is Mahony. Perhaps I ought to say The Mahony of Inishraher. He's done more than anyone else, except, perhaps, Price and Miss Coppinger, to secure that picture for you."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Mahony," said Lord Edmund.

"Don't say Mister," said Royce. "I told you that he was The Mahony of Inishraher. In addressing gentlemen of ancient Gaelic family the word Mister is never used. You ought to have known that. Mahony," he went on, "this is Lord Edmund Troyte, and he's going to give you £5 as a small recognition of your services in the matter of the picture."

Mahony bowed gravely.

Lord Edmund took a note-case from his pocket.

"Mr. Mahony——" he began.

"The Mahony," said Royce. "Do be careful. You wouldn't like anyone to call you Mr. Troyte. And now I come to think of it, you'd better give him £10. Mahony, the other fiver is for Mick. Mick is the hotel porter," he explained. "And he's done a good deal to keep the picture out of Kaitcer's hands."

Lord Edmund handed the two £5 notes to Mahony, who received them in dignified silence.

"Seen anything of Miss Coppinger and Mr. Price?" said Royce.

Mahony, without speaking, pointed out to the bay. A small boat was to be seen running home before the wind.

"Do you mean to say they're only just getting home now? They must have gone half-way to America."

"They went no further than Corrigeen Glas reef," said Mahony. "Miss Mary ran the boat on a rock there, trying the passage, and they couldn't get away until the tide rose. It was Mick," he added, "who was telling me about it."

"Mick's wonderful," said Royce. "He's been worth far more than that £5 to our side, Lord Edmund.

He knows everything. How do you think he found out about their running on that rock, Mahony?"

"It was Jimmy Rafferty's niece told him," said Mahony, "and, what's more, she said that Rafferty's pretty near mad and cursing so as the devil himself would be afraid to listen to him."

"Perhaps," said Lord Edmund, "I ought to give Rafferty £5, too?"

"Certainly not," said Royce. "The only other person you have to reward is Price, and what I advise you to do in his case is this: When you're paying Sir Amos the price of the picture, insist that half the money is secured for his daughter as a dot."

"But," said Lord Edmund, "how can I insist on anything of the sort? I cannot dictate to Sir Amos what he's to do with his own money."

"Oh, yes you can," said Royce. "All you have to say is that you won't buy the picture unless he provides for his daughter properly."

"But really—— It seems to me that I can hardly interfere in Sir Amos's private affairs."

"It seems to me," said Royce, "that you're absolutely bound to do something for Price, something handsome, after all he's done for you."

"But, surely," said Lord Edmund, "we're talking now about Miss Coppinger, not about Price."

"Same thing," said Royce. "They're going to be married."

"Are they?" said Lord Edmund. "I didn't know. How could I know?"

"Of course they are," said Royce, "and you ought to have known it. They've spent—how long do you suppose they were stuck on that reef, Mahony?"

"Judging by what Mick said to me," said Mahony, "I would say they were there for upwards of two hours."

"Then," said Royce, "they're certainly engaged to be married. You've known Price a great deal longer than I have, Lord Edmund, and you ought to know that Price isn't the sort of man to spend two hours on a desert island with a girl he's over head and ears in love with and not be engaged to her when he came back."

"If that's really so——" said Lord Edmund.

"Half the price of the picture," said Royce, "will make quite a handsome dot for her, and I'll draw up a deed of settlement that Sir Amos won't be able to wriggle out of."

A few minutes later Lord Edmund asked a question.

"I'm a little puzzled," he said, "about one point. Why is it that so many of the people here have taken an enormous amount of trouble and run serious risks in order to get this picture to me. They don't know me, probably most of them have never even heard of me."

"They know this much about you," said Royce. "You're the only British statesman who has never attempted to do anything for Ireland. It's only natural that they're a little grateful."

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